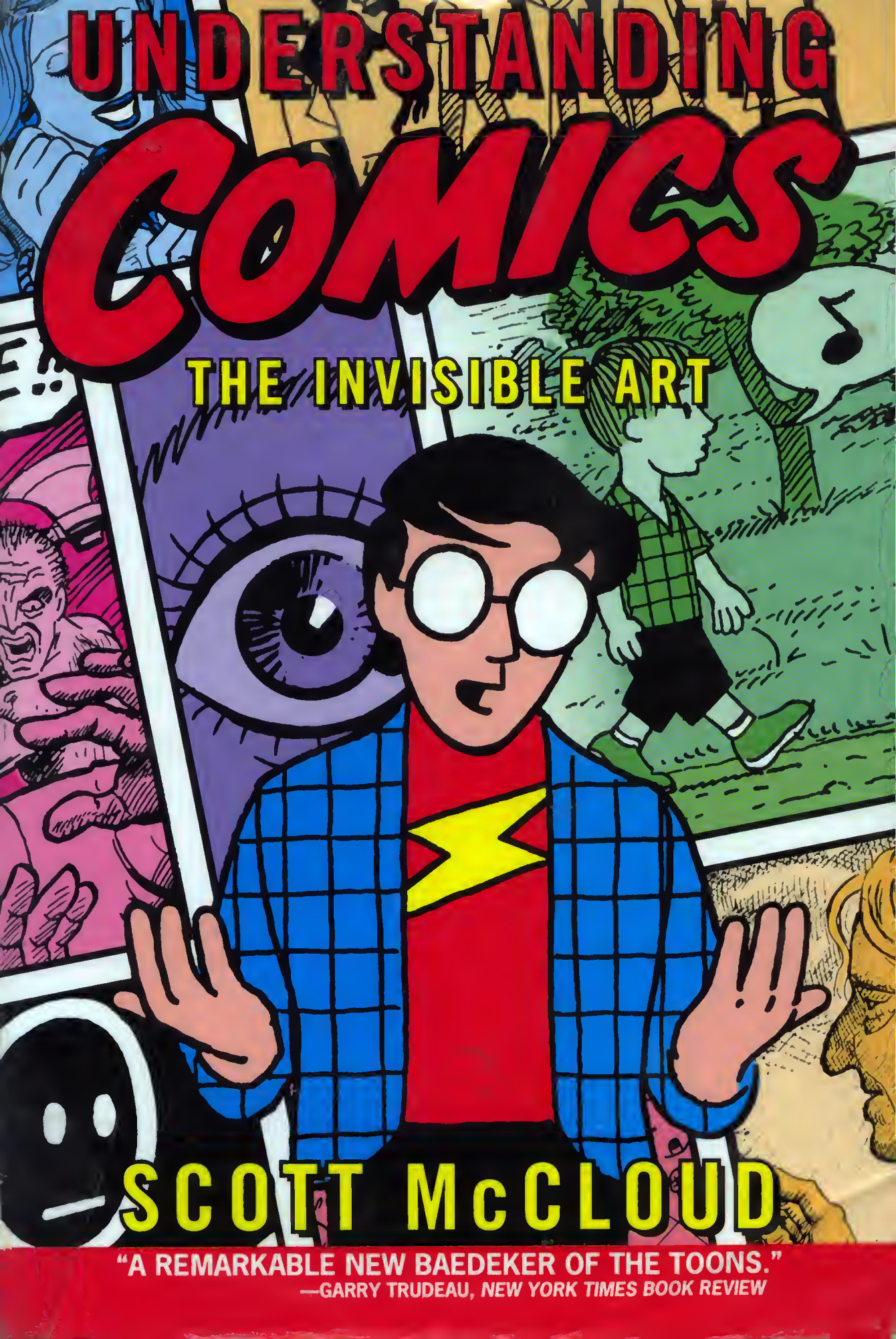

UNDERSTANDING
COMICS
THE INVISIBLE ART
SCOTT McCLOUD
"A REMARKABLE NEW BAEDEKER OF THE TOONS."
—GARRY TRUDEAU, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW



A Kitchen Sink Book for
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A Division of HarperCollins*Publishers*

WRITING AND ART
SCOTT McCLOUD

LETTERING
BOB LAPPAN

EDITORIAL ADVICE AND
SELECTIVE EGO-TRIMMING
STEVE BISSETTE
KURT BUSIEK
NEIL GAIMAN
BOB LAPPAN
JENNIFER LEE
LARRY MARDER
IVY RATAFIA

EXTRA SPECIAL THANKS
WILL EISNER

EDITOR
MARK MARTIN

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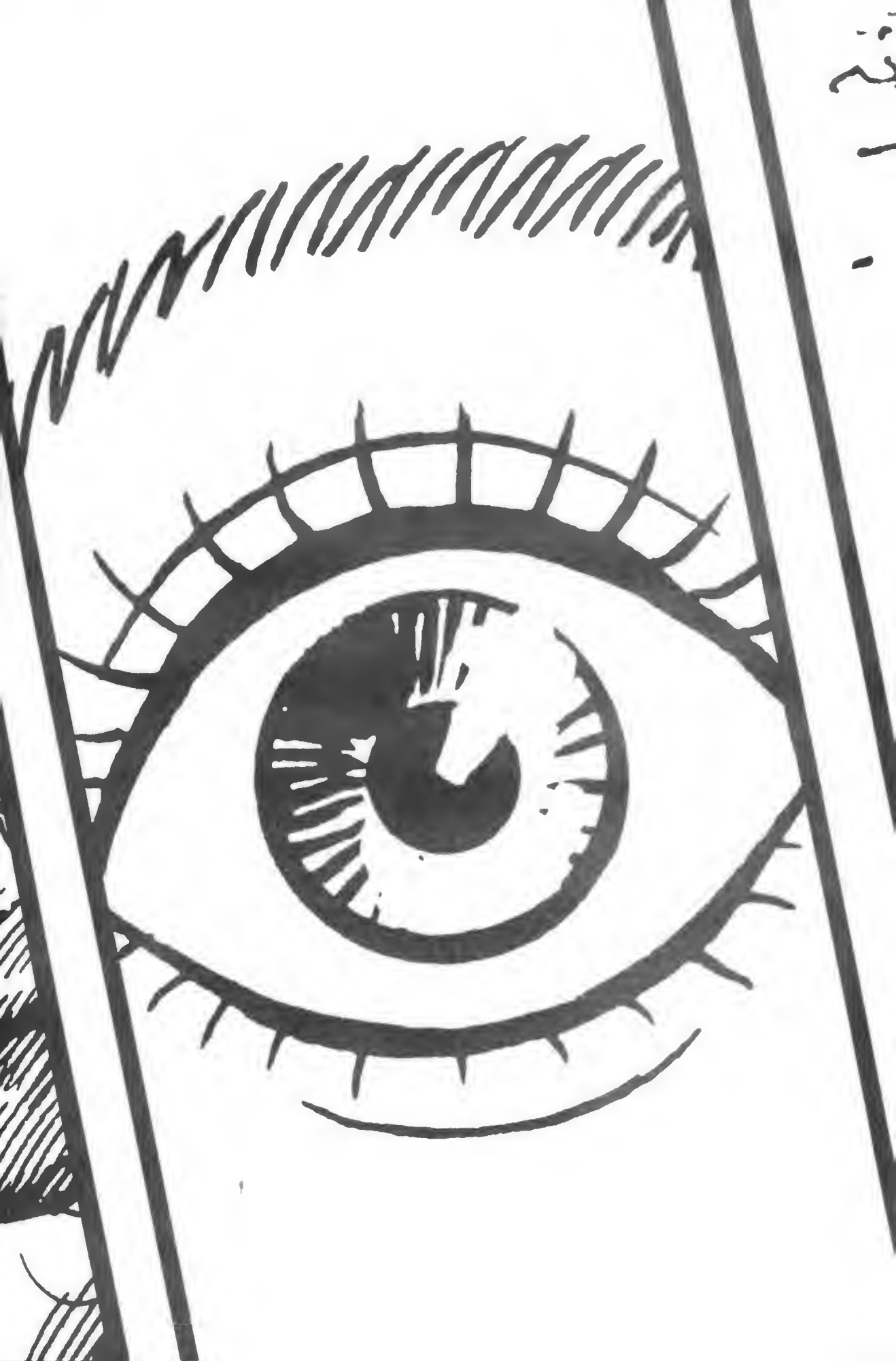
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The book you're about to read took 15 months to produce and many of the ideas it contains had been on the back-burner for over nine years, so acknowledging all of those who have helped in its development may be next to impossible. Furthermore, since its initial publication in the comics industry, I've received tremendous support from hundreds of fellow travelers in all corners of the publishing world. My apologies to anyone who is not listed below and should have been.

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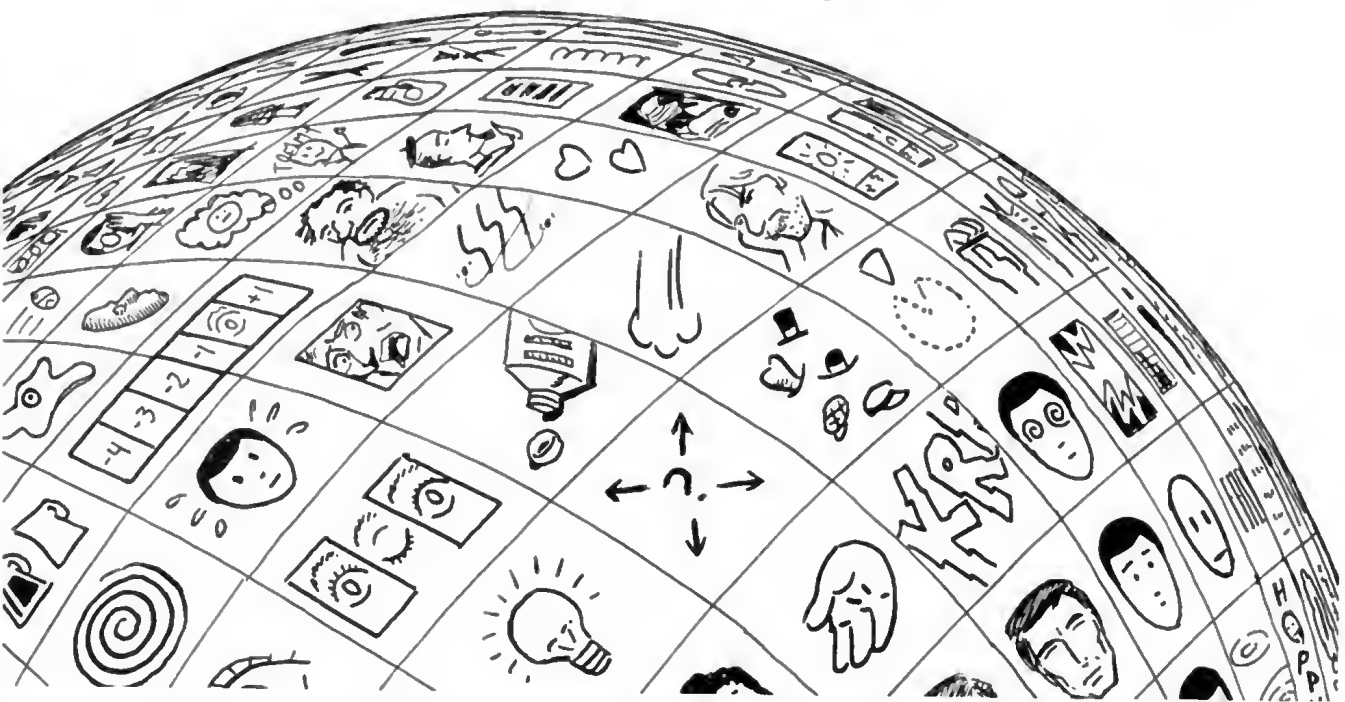
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Without Kevin Eastman this book might have never seen the light of day. Thank you, Kevin.

Without Ian Ballantine, you wouldn't be holding it in your hands today. Thank you, Ian.

And without you, Ivy, it wouldn't have been much fun. I love you madly. Let's take tomorrow off.

Scott McCloud





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INTRODUCTION



UNDERSTANDING COMICS

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT.











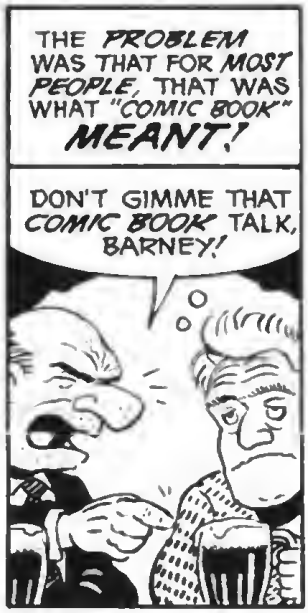

IN LESS THAN A YEAR, I BECAME TOTALLY OBSESSED WITH COMICS! I DECIDED TO BECOME A COMICS ARTIST IN 10th GRADE AND BEGAN TO PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!


I FELT THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING LURKING IN COMICS... SOMETHING THAT HAD NEVER BEEN DONE.
SOME KIND OF HIDDEN POWER!

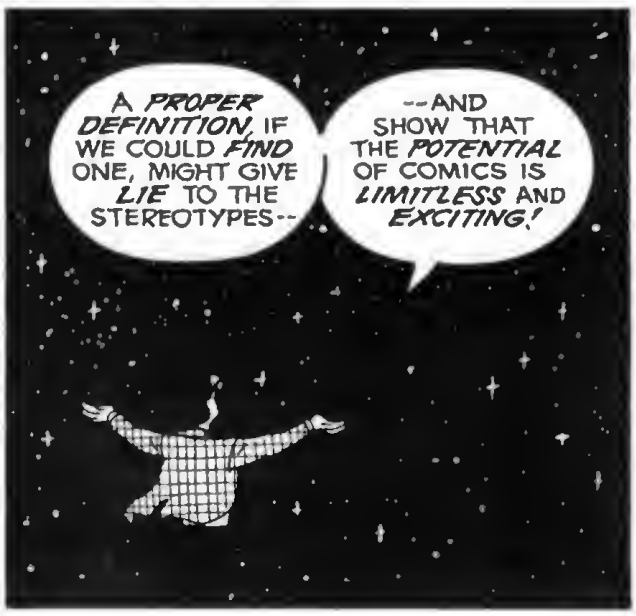

BUT WHENEVER I TRIED TO EXPLAIN MY FEELING, I FAILED MISERABLY.
COMIC BOOKS?! HA! HA! HA!
BUT IT-- BUT IT'S-- BUH.


SURE, I REALIZED THAT COMIC BOOKS WERE USUALLY CRUDE, POORLY-DRAWN, SEMILITERATE, CHEAP, DISPOSABLE KIDDIE FARE--

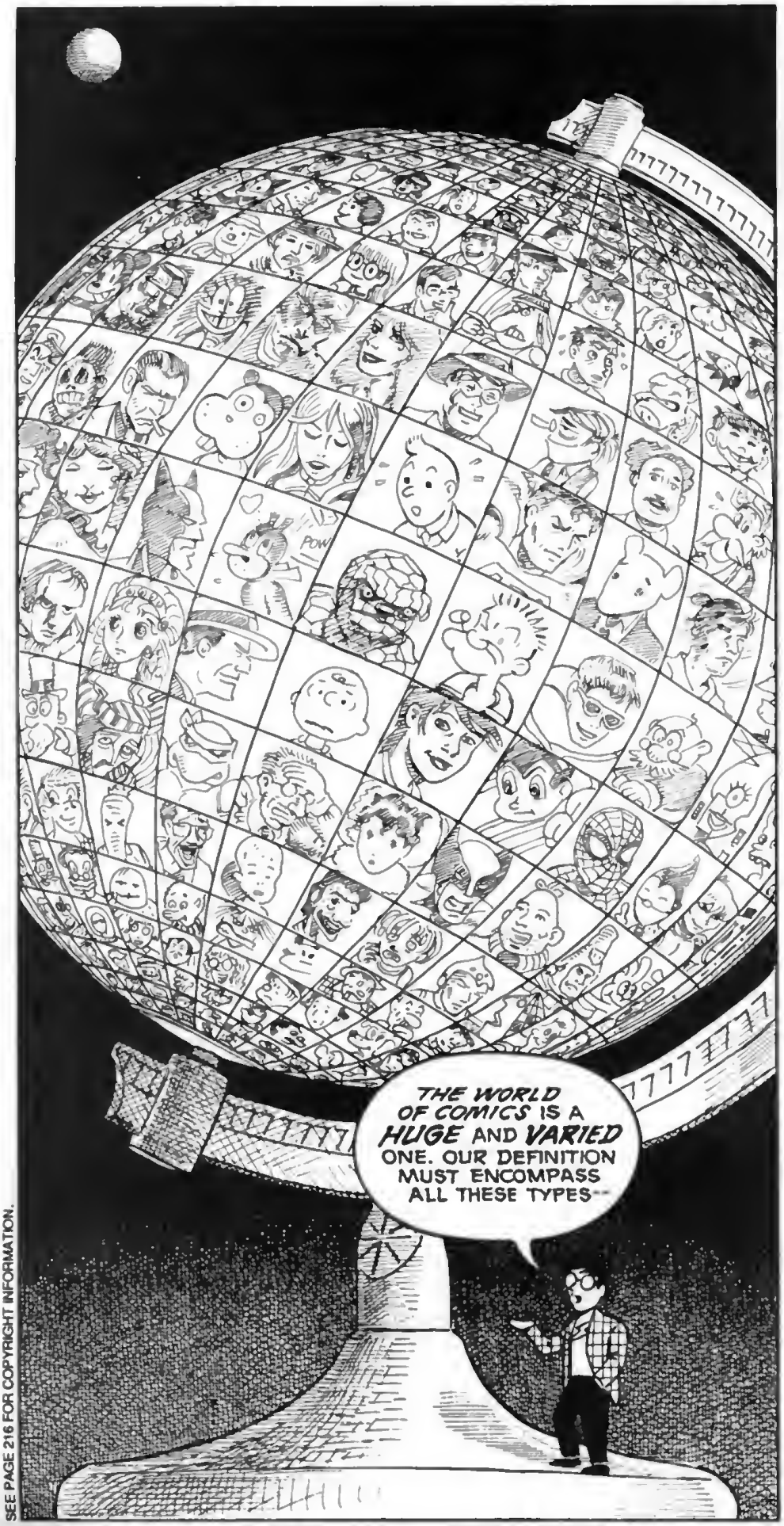

--BUT--
THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE!


THE PROBLEM WAS THAT FOR MOST PEOPLE, THAT WAS WHAT "COMIC BOOK" MEANT!
DON'T GIMME THAT COMIC BOOK TALK, BARNEY!


IF PEOPLE FAILED TO UNDERSTAND COMICS, IT WAS BECAUSE THEY DEFINED WHAT COMICS COULD BE TOO NARROWLY!


A PROPER DEFINITION, IF WE COULD FIND ONE, MIGHT GIVE LIE TO THE STEREOTYPES--
--AND SHOW THAT THE POTENTIAL OF COMICS IS LIMITLESS AND EXCITING!


THIS IS WHERE OUR JOURNEY BEGINS.

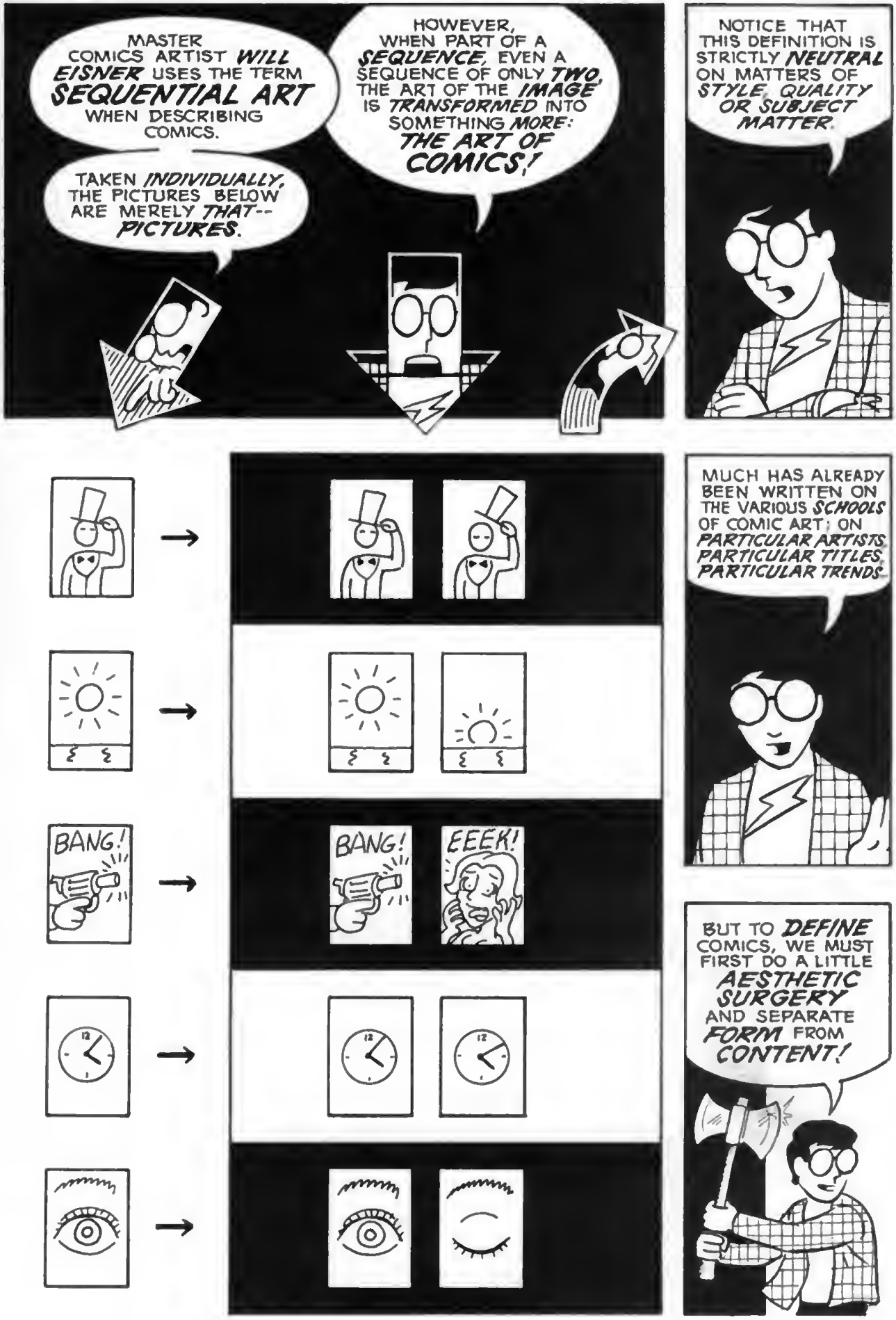






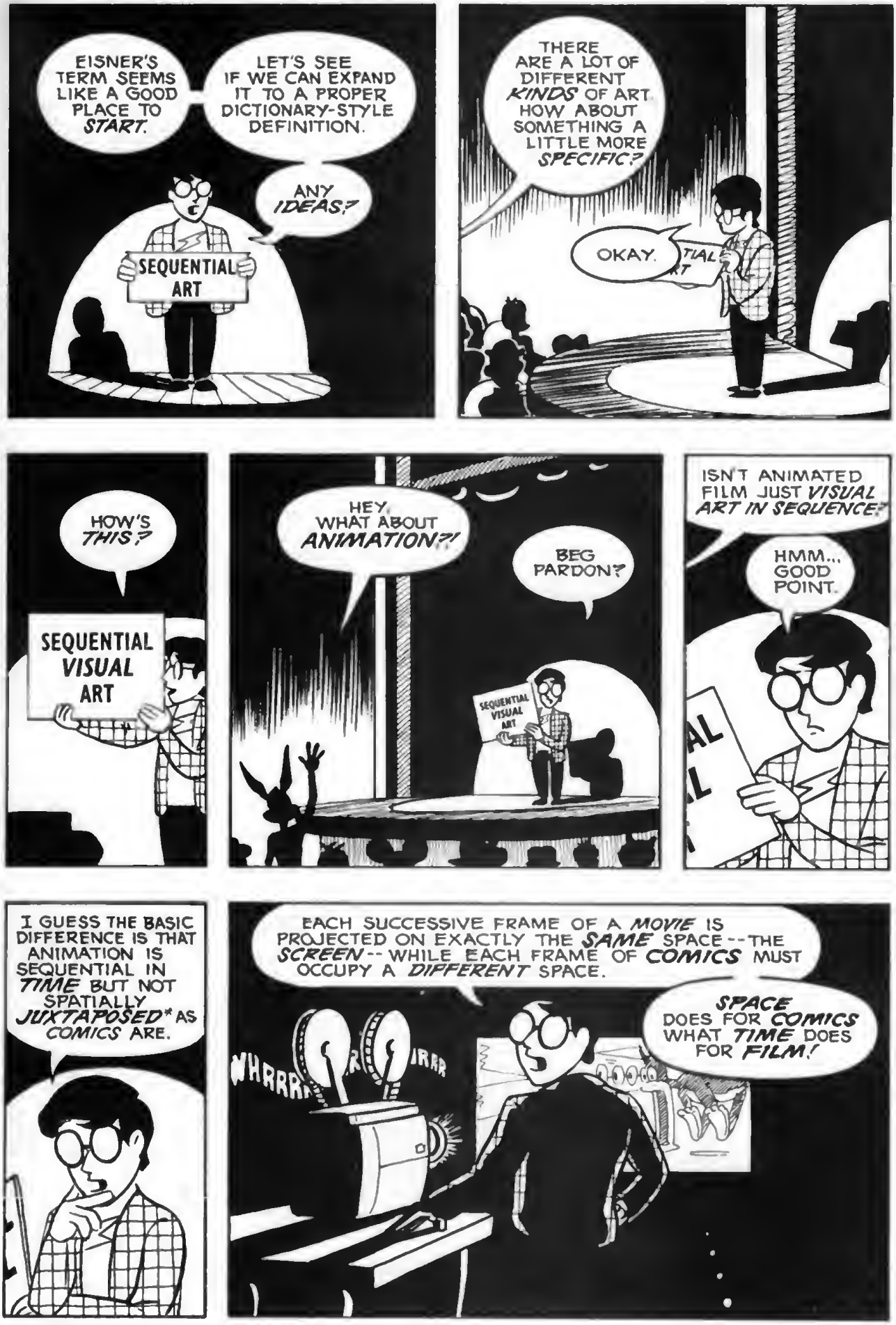


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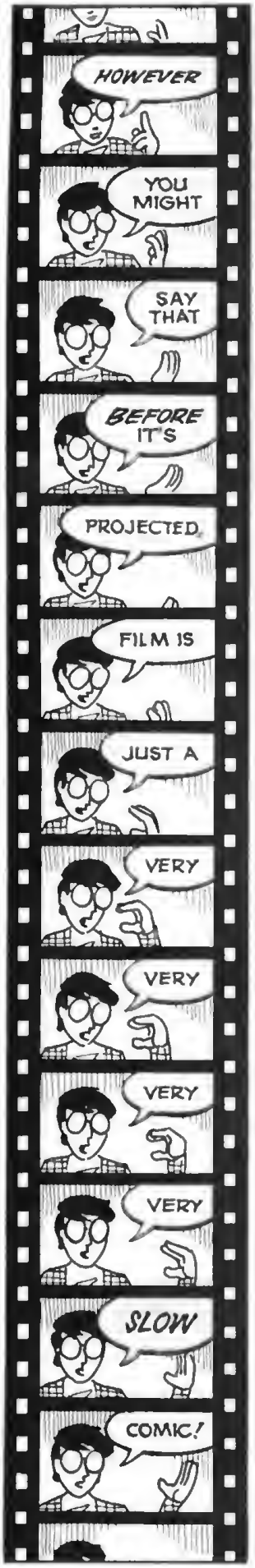

MASTER COMICS ARTIST WILL EISNER USES THE TERM SEQUENTIAL ART WHEN DESCRIBING COMICS.
TAKEN INDIVIDUALLY, THE PICTURES BELOW ARE MERELY THAT-- PICTURES.
HOWEVER, WHEN PART OF A SEQUENCE, EVEN A SEQUENCE OF ONLY TWO, THE ART OF THE IMAGE IS TRANSFORMED INTO SOMETHING MORE: THE ART OF COMICS!
NOTICE THAT THIS DEFINITION IS STRICTLY NEUTRAL ON MATTERS OF STYLE, QUALITY OR SUBJECT MATTER.
BANG!
BANG!
EEEK!
MUCH HAS ALREADY BEEN WRITTEN ON THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF COMIC ART; ON PARTICULAR ARTISTS, PARTICULAR TITLES, PARTICULAR TRENDS...
BUT TO DEFINE COMICS, WE MUST FIRST DO A LITTLE AESTHETIC SURGERY AND SEPARATE FORM FROM CONTENT!

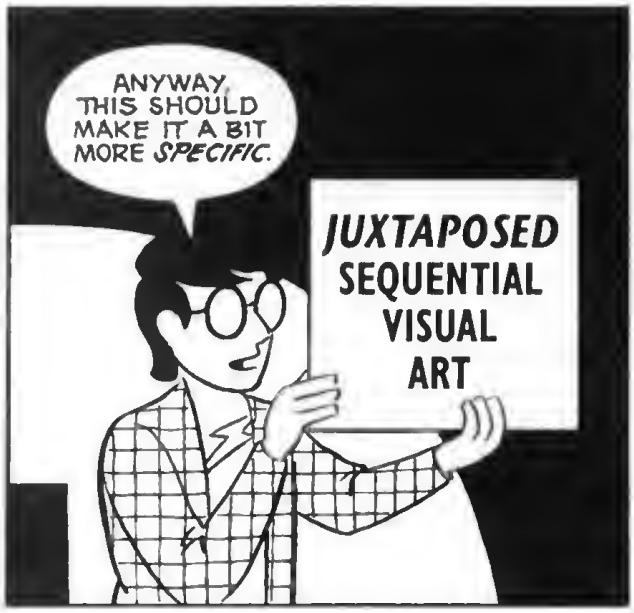


*EISNER'S OWN *COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART* BEING A HAPPY EXCEPTION.



*JUXTAPOSED= ADJACENT, SIDE-BY-SIDE GREAT ART SCHOOL WORD.

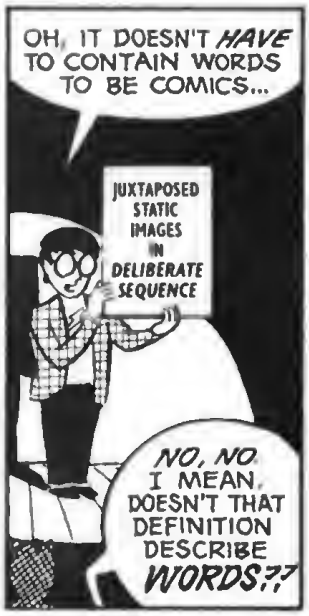

HOWEVER
YOU MIGHT
SAY THAT
BEFORE IT'S
PROJECTED
FILM IS
JUST A
VERY
VERY
VERY
VERY
SLOW
COMIC!

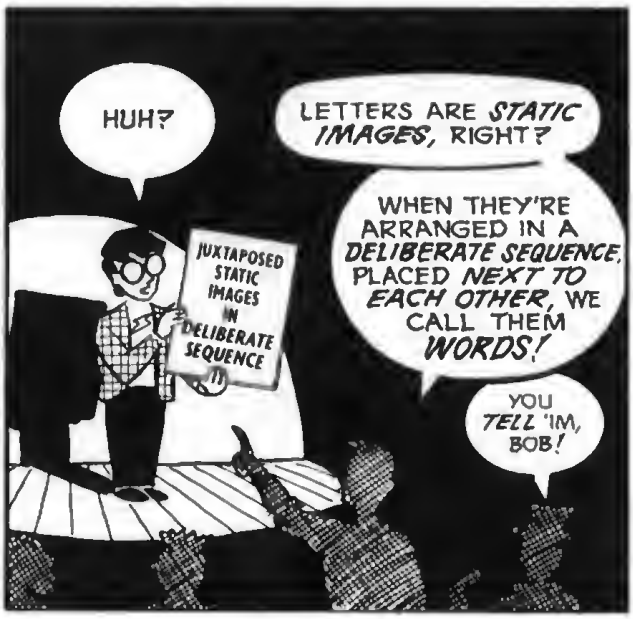

ANYWAY, THIS SHOULD MAKE IT A BIT MORE SPECIFIC.
JUXTAPOSED SEQUENTIAL VISUAL ART


DOES IT HAVE TO SAY "ART"? DOESN'T THAT IMPLY SOME SORT OF VALUE JUDGMENT?
WELL...

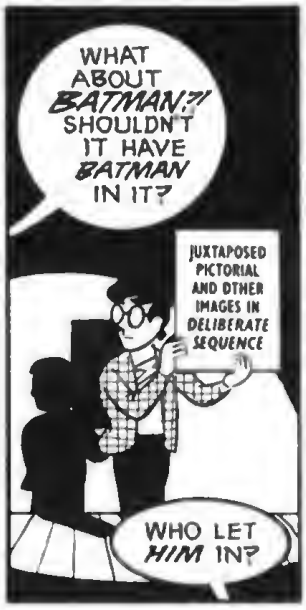

OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS?
JUXTAPOSED SEQUENTIAL STATIC IMAGES
NOW IT SOUNDS KIND OF ARBITRARY.


OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS?
JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE
WHAT ABOUT WORDS?


OH, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO CONTAIN WORDS TO BE COMICS...
JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE
NO, NO. I MEAN, DOESN'T THAT DEFINITION DESCRIBE WORDS?!


HUH?
LETTERS ARE STATIC IMAGES, RIGHT?
JUXTAPOSED STATIC IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE
WHEN THEY'RE ARRANGED IN A DELIBERATE SEQUENCE, PLACED NEXT TO EACH OTHER, WE CALL THEM WORDS!
YOU TELL 'IM, BOB!





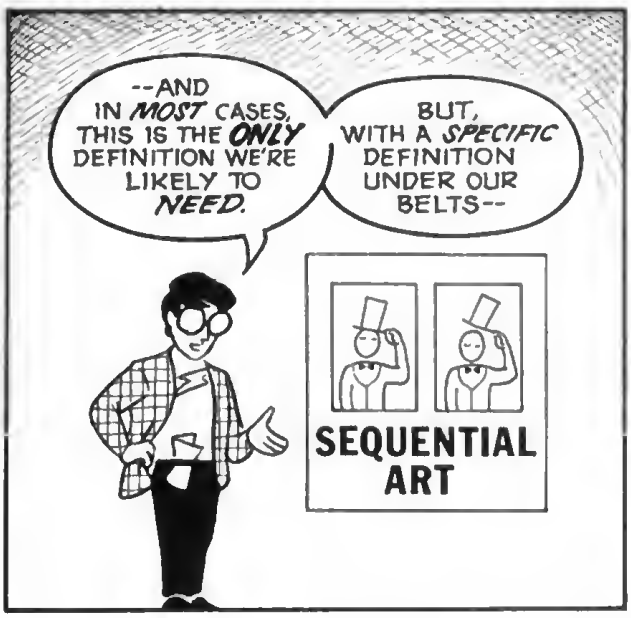




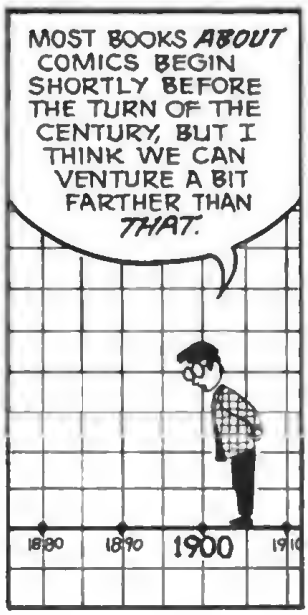
adv.

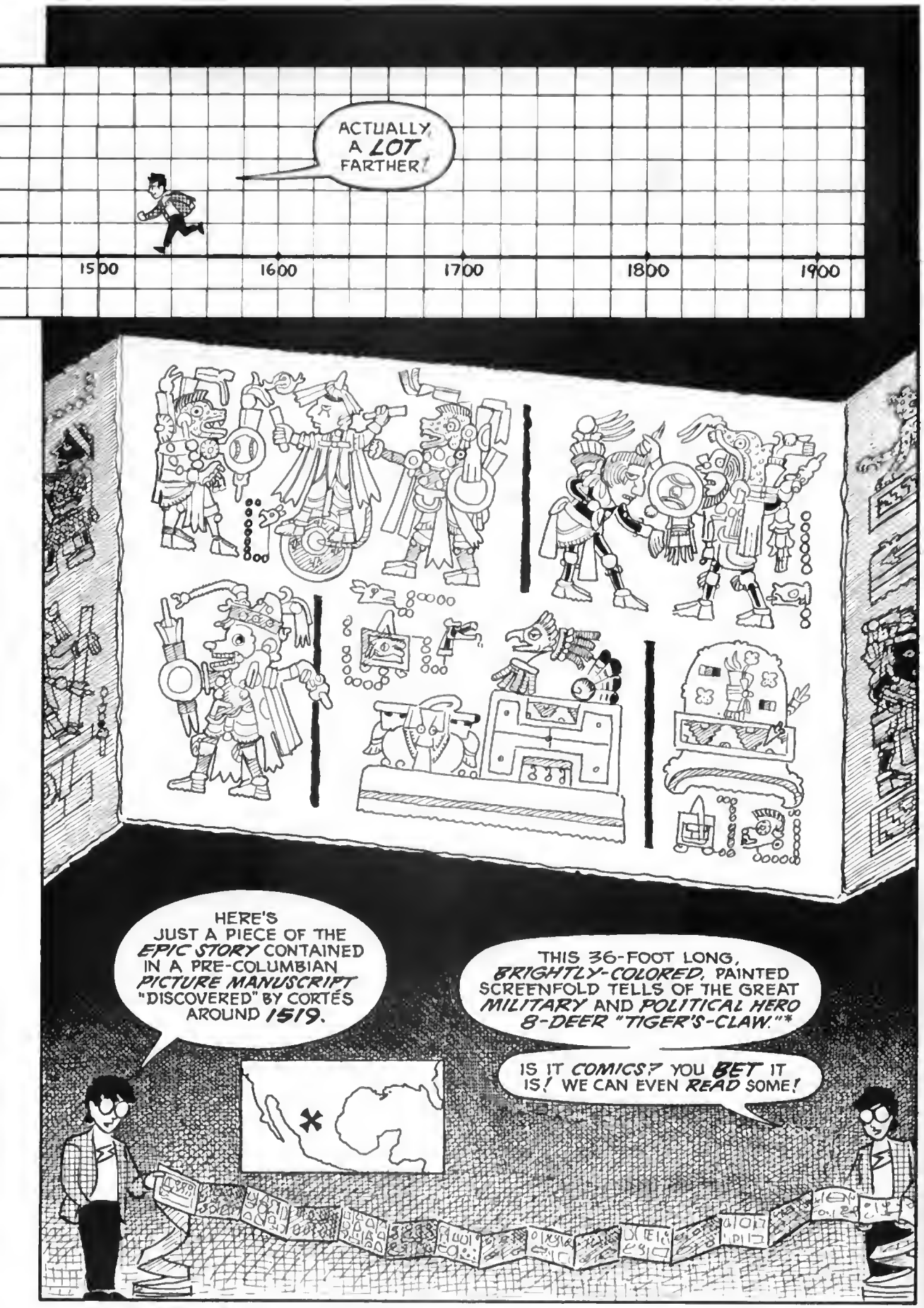
com·ics (kom'iks) **n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. **2.** Superheroes in bright colorful costumes, fighting dastardly villains who want to conquer the world, in violent sensational pulse-pounding action sequences! **3.** Cute, cuddly bunnies, mice and roly-poly bears, dancing to and fro-- Hippity-Hop, Hippity-Hop. **4.** Corruptor of our Nation's Youth. **com·ing.** (kum'ing) **adj.**











* OR "OCELOT'S CLAW" DEPENDING ON WHOSE BOOK YOU READ. THIS SEQUENCE IS BASED ON A READING BY MEXICAN HISTORIAN AND ARCHAEOLOGIST ALFONSO CASO.

FIRST, WE SEPARATE WORDS FROM *PICTURES*.



8-DEER "TIGER'S CLAW"

(A NAME)



11 HOUSE 12 MONKEY

(A DATE)

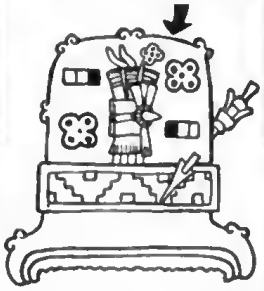


GOD XIPE'S BUNDLE

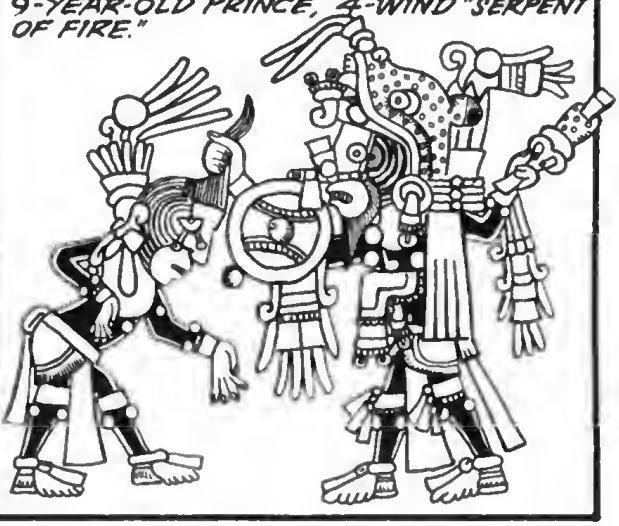
(GLYPH FOR PLACE WHOSE NAME WE DON'T KNOW.)

THEN *REVERSE* IT AND STRAIGHTEN IT OUT (THE ORIGINAL READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT AND *ZIGZAGGED*.) AND *BEGIN*:

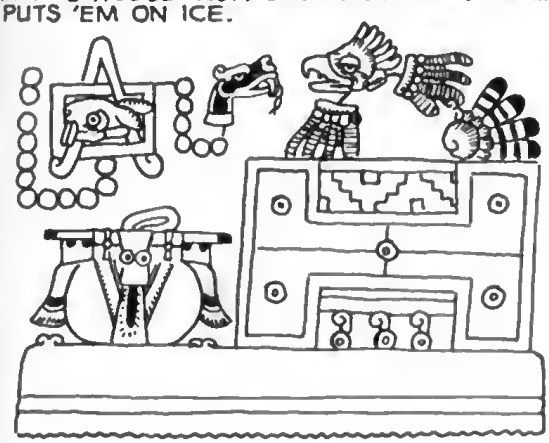
THE YEAR: *1049 AD*
THE DATE: *MAY 3**
THE PLACE: *HERE!*



OUR HERO, *8-DEER "TIGER'S CLAW"*, CONQUERS THE PLACE AND CAPTURES THE *9-YEAR-OLD PRINCE, 4-WIND "SERPENT OF FIRE."*

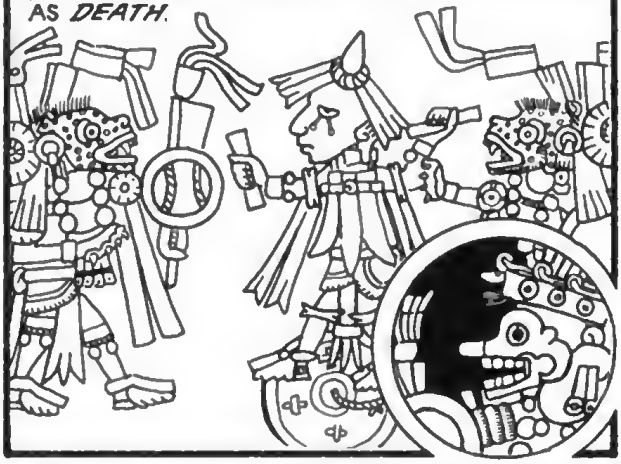


8-DEER ALSO CAPTURES THE PRINCE'S OLDER BROTHERS, *10-DOG "EAGLE COPAL BURNING"* AND *6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES"* AND PUTS 'EM ON ICE.

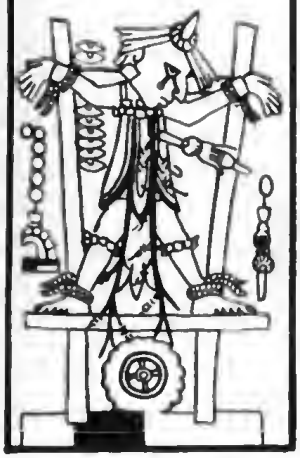


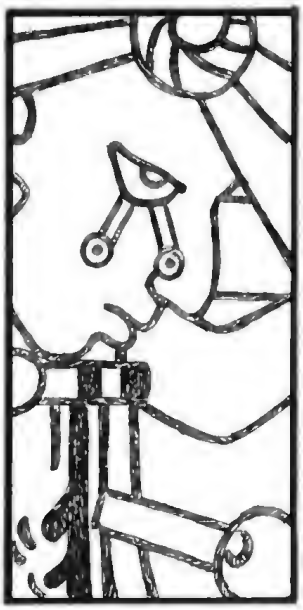
(I'M TAKING THE TRANSLATOR'S WORD ON THIS ONE.)

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, *8-DEER* AND (PROBABLY) HIS BROTHER, DISGUISED AS *TIGERS*, ENGAGE IN *SACRIFICIAL GLADITORIAL COMBAT* WITH THE PRINCE, *10-DOG*, AND ANOTHER WARRIOR DISGUISED AS *DEATH*.



8-DEER KILLS THE OTHER PRINCE, *6-HOUSE "ROW OF FLINT KNIVES"* EIGHT DAYS LATER.

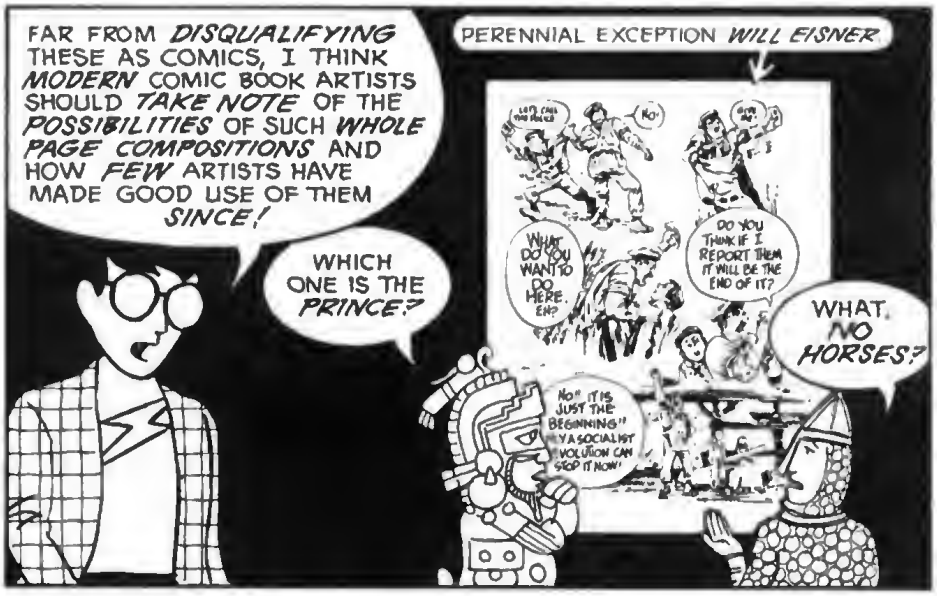


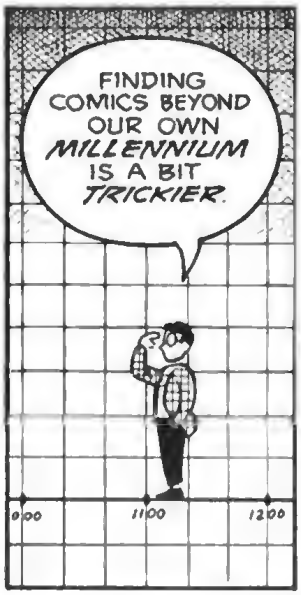


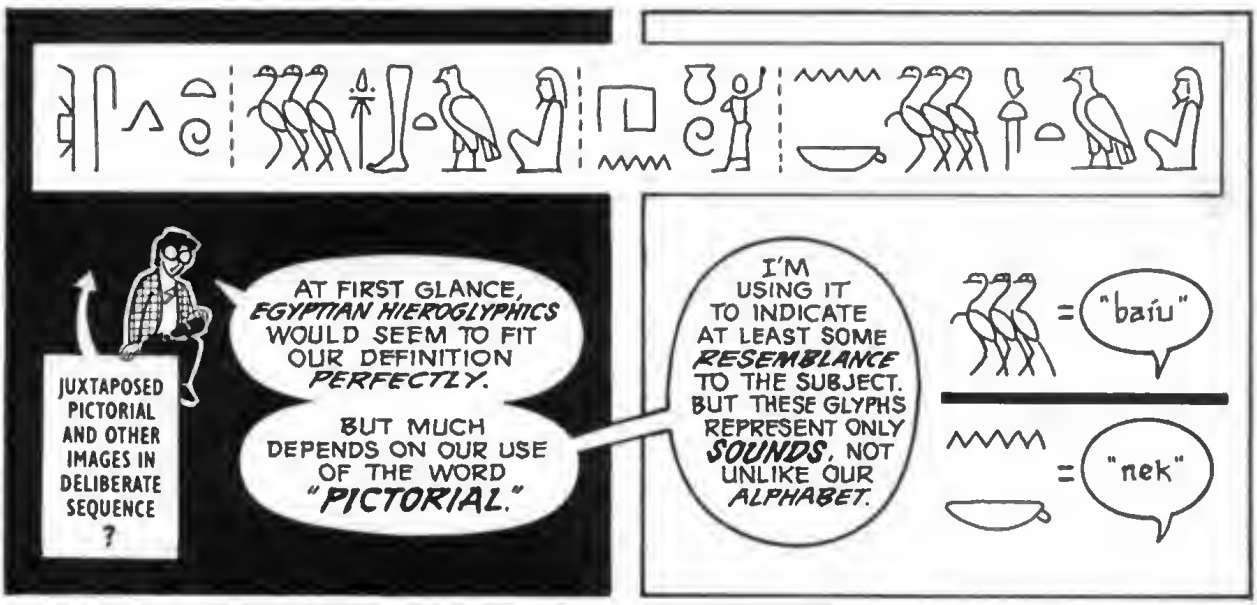


*WE KNOW THE YEAR; I'M JUST *GUESSING* AT THE DATE REPRESENTED BY "12 MONKEY"


HUNDREDS OF YEARS BEFORE CORTÉS BEGAN COLLECTING COMICS, FRANCE PRODUCED THE STRIKINGLY SIMILAR WORK WE CALL THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY.
THIS 230 FOOT LONG TAPESTRY DETAILS THE NORMAN CONQUEST OF ENGLAND, BEGINNING IN 1066.
TRANSLATION: THE BATTLE RAGES
BISHOP ODIN ENCOURAGES HIS


FAR FROM DISQUALIFYING THESE AS COMICS, I THINK MODERN COMIC BOOK ARTISTS SHOULD TAKE NOTE OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF SUCH WHOLE PAGE COMPOSITIONS AND HOW FEW ARTISTS HAVE MADE GOOD USE OF THEM SINCE!
WHICH ONE IS THE PRINCE?
PERENNIAL EXCEPTION WILL EISNER
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO HERE, EH?
DO YOU THINK IF I REPORT THEM IT WILL BE THE END OF IT?
WHAT, NO HORSES?
"NO" IT IS JUST THE BEGINNING" "A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION CAN STOP IT NOW!


FINDING COMICS BEYOND OUR OWN MILLENNIUM IS A BIT TRICKIER.
1000
1100
1200


JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE ?
AT FIRST GLANCE, EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS WOULD SEEM TO FIT OUR DEFINITION PERFECTLY.
BUT MUCH DEPENDS ON OUR USE OF THE WORD "PICTORIAL."
I'M USING IT TO INDICATE AT LEAST SOME RESEMBLANCE TO THE SUBJECT. BUT THESE GLYPHS REPRESENT ONLY SOUNDS, NOT UNLIKE OUR ALPHABET.
= "baiu"
= "nek"

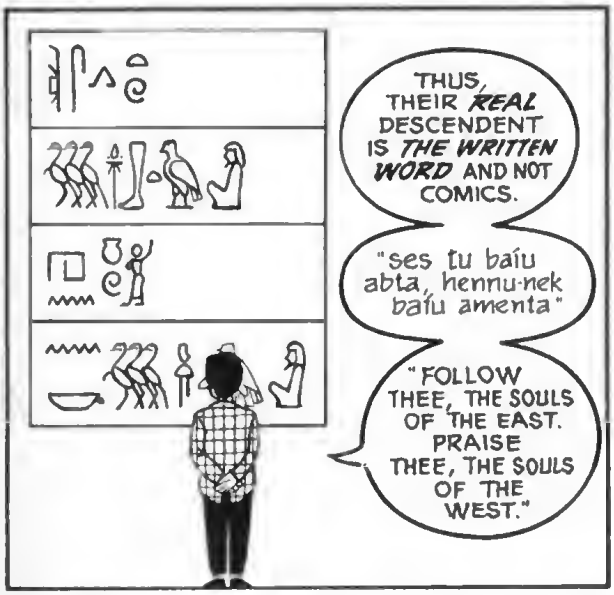
READING *LEFT TO RIGHT* WE SEE THE *EVENTS* OF THE CONQUEST, IN *DELIBERATE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER* UNFOLD BEFORE OUR VERY *EYES.*

AS WITH THE *MEXICAN CODEX*, THERE ARE NO *PANEL BORDERS* PER SE, BUT THERE ARE CLEAR DIVISIONS OF SCENE BY *SUBJECT MATTER.*



DUKE WILLIAM REMOVES HIS HELMET TO RALLY HIS SOLDIERS

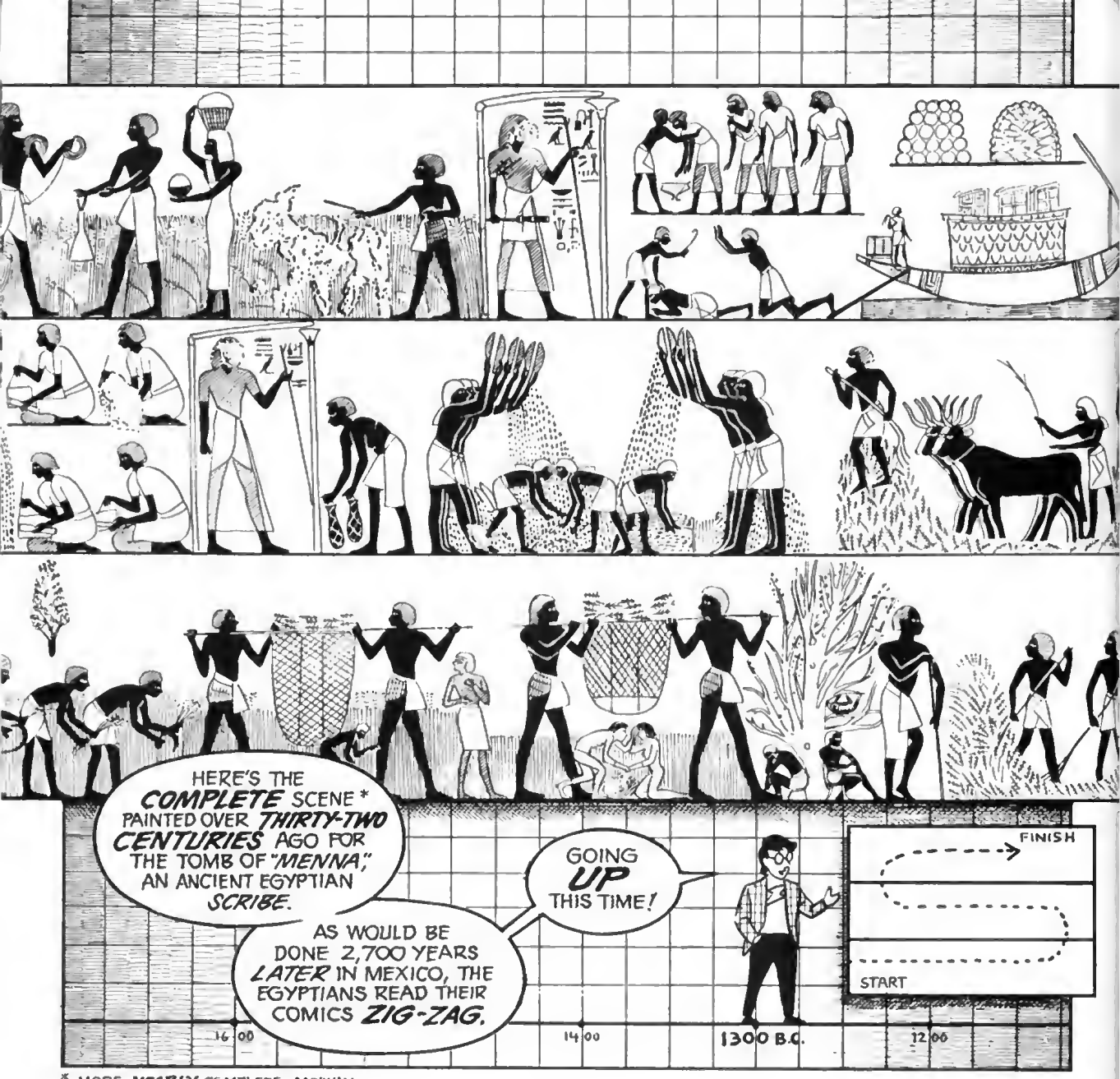
HAROLD'S ARMY IS CUT TO PIECES











* MORE *NEARLY* COMPLETE, ANYWAY





PAINTING TRACED FOR BLACK AND WHITE REPRODUCTION.

THE SHEAVES ARE THEN *RAKED OUT* INTO A *THICK CARPET OF WHEAT.*



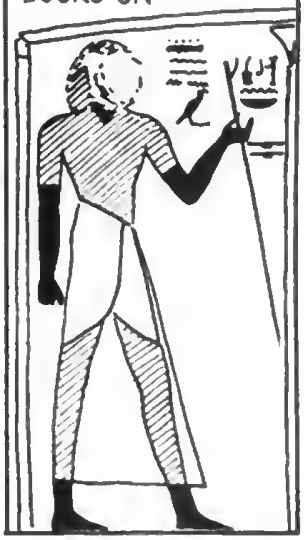
THEN OXEN TREAD *KERNELS* OUT OF THE HUSKS.



NEXT, PEASANTS SEPARATE THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF.



OLD MENNA HIMSELF LOOKS ON--*



--AS LOYAL SCRIBES RECORD THE YIELD ON THEIR TABLETS.



NOW AN OFFICIAL USES A MEASURING ROPE TO *SURVEY THE LAND* AND DECIDE HOW MUCH WHEAT IS OWED IN *TAXES.*



AND AS MENNA WATCHES, FARMERS *LATE* IN PAYING THEIR TAXES ARE *BEATEN.*



I'LL *GLADLY ADMIT* THAT I HAVE *NO IDEA* WHERE OR *WHEN* COMICS ORIGINATED. LET *OTHERS* WRESTLE WITH *THAT* ONE.



I'VE ONLY SCRATCHED THE *SURFACE* IN THIS CHAPTER... *TRAJAN'S COLUMN, GREEK PAINTING, JAPANESE SCROLLS...* ALL THESE HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED AND ALL SHOULD BE EXPLORED.



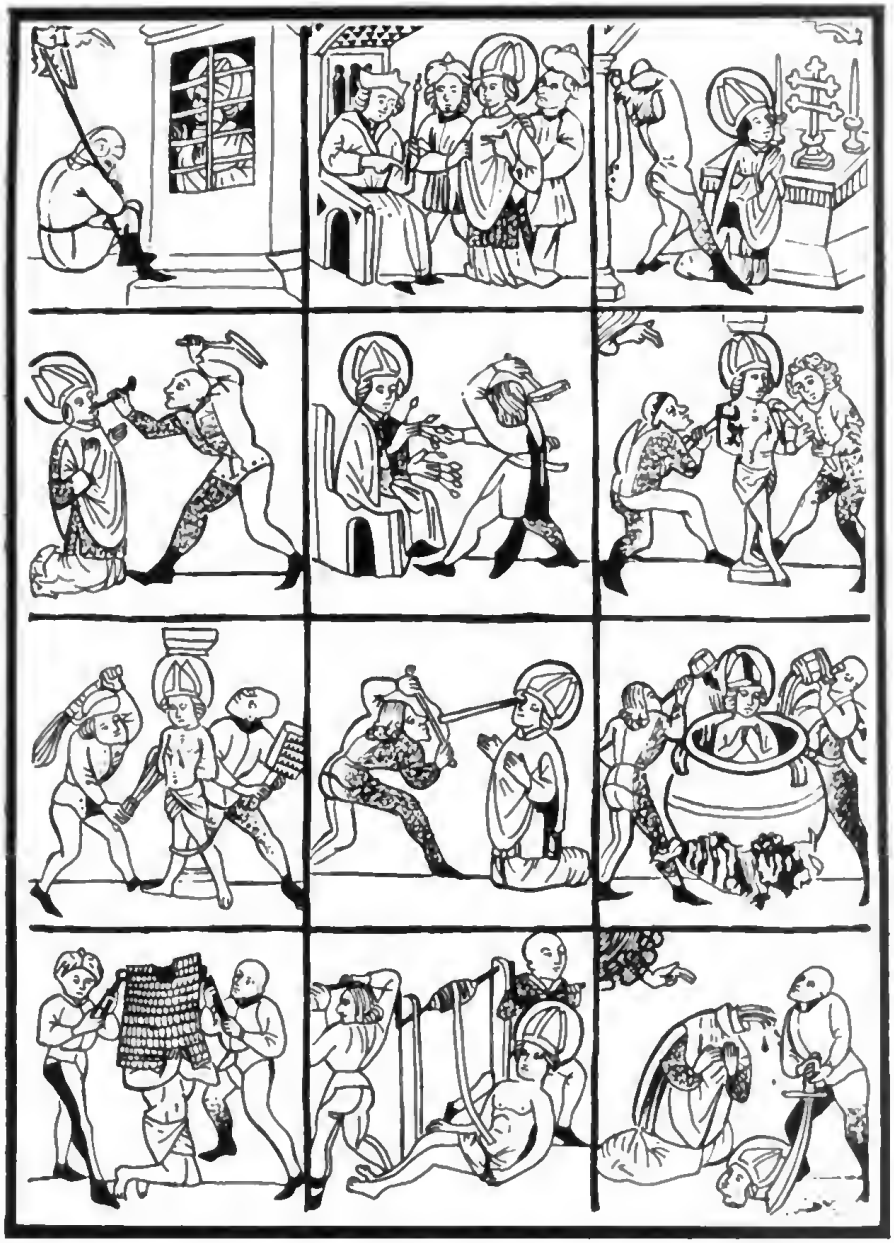
BUT THERE IS *ONE* EVENT WHICH LOOMS AS LARGE IN *COMICS* HISTORY AS IT DOES IN THE HISTORY OF THE *WRITTEN WORD.*



THE INVENTION OF PRINTING.

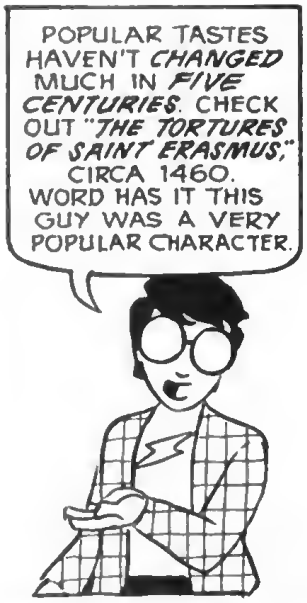


*FACE GOUGED OUT BY FUTURE GENERATIONS OF LEADERS



ART RESTORED FOR CLARITY - OTHERWISE UNCHANGED







* MAYBE I SHOULDN'T SAY "INVENT". EUROPEANS WERE A BIT LATE IN DISCOVERING PRINTING.

HOGARTH'S STORIES WERE FIRST EXHIBITED AS A SERIES OF *PAINTINGS* AND LATER SOLD AS A PORTFOLIO OF *ENGRAVINGS*.

BOTH THE PAINTINGS AND ENGRAVINGS WERE DESIGNED TO BE VIEWED *SIDE-BY-SIDE --IN SEQUENCE!*

"*A HARLOT'S PROGRESS*" AND ITS SEQUEL "*A RAKE'S PROGRESS*" PROVED SO POPULAR, NEW *COPYRIGHT LAWS* WERE CREATED TO PROTECT THIS NEW FORM.

GRRR!!

THE FATHER OF THE *MODERN* COMIC IN MANY WAYS IS *RODOLPHE TÖPFFER*, WHOSE LIGHT SATIRIC PICTURE STORIES, STARTING IN THE MID-1800's, EMPLOYED *CARTOONING* AND *PANEL BORDERS*, AND FEATURED THE FIRST INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATION OF *WORDS* AND *PICTURES* SEEN IN EUROPE.

[TRANSLATION BY E. WIESE.]

UNFORTUNATELY, TÖPFFER HIMSELF FAILED TO GRASP AT FIRST THE FULL POTENTIAL OF HIS INVENTION, SEEING IT AS A MERE *DIVERSION*, A SIMPLE *HOBBY*...

"IF FOR THE FUTURE, HE [TÖPFFER] WOULD CHOOSE A LESS FRIVOLOUS SUBJECT AND RESTRICT HIMSELF A LITTLE, HE WOULD PRODUCE THINGS BEYOND ALL CONCEPTION."

-Goethe

EVEN SO, TÖPFFER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE *UNDERSTANDING* OF COMICS IS CONSIDERABLE, IF ONLY FOR HIS REALIZATION THAT HE WHO WAS NEITHER ARTIST NOR WRITER--

-- HAD CREATED AND MASTERED A FORM WHICH WAS AT ONCE *BOTH* AND *NEITHER*.

A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN.

BRITISH CARICATURE MAGAZINES KEPT THE TRADITIONS ALIVE AND AS THE 20TH CENTURY DREW NEAR, THE COMICS WE **CALL** COMICS BEGAN TO APPEAR AND EVENTUALLY TO *THRIVE* IN A STEADY STREAM OF WAKING DREAMS THAT HAS YET TO ABATE.

1870 1880 1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940

BUT EVEN IN *THIS* CENTURY, OUR DEFINITION CAN HELP TO ILLUMINATE THE WORKS OF SOME UNSUNG HEROES.

JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE

SOME OF THE MOST *INSPIRED* AND *INNOVATIVE* COMICS OF OUR CENTURY HAVE NEVER RECEIVED RECOGNITION **AS** COMICS, NOT SO MUCH *IN SPITE* OF THEIR SUPERIOR QUALITIES AS *BECAUSE* OF THEM.

TANTRUM Jules Feiffer

Shel Silverstein

The Snowman RAYMOND BRIGGS

AMP HIGH ORE Y

FOR MUCH OF THIS CENTURY, THE WORD "COMICS" HAS HAD SUCH *NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS* THAT MANY OF COMICS' MOST *DEVOTED PRACTITIONERS* HAVE PREFERRED TO BE KNOWN AS *"ILLUSTRATORS," "COMMERCIAL ARTISTS"* OR, AT BEST, *"CARTOONISTS"!*

MILT GROSS HEART OF

AND SO, COMICS' LOW SELF-ESTEEM IS *SELF-PERPETUATING!* THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE NECESSARY TO *COUNTERACT* COMICS' NEGATIVE IMAGE IS OBSCURED **BY** THAT NEGATIVITY.

WOODCUT ARTIST *LYND WARD* IS ONE SUCH *MISSING LINK*. WARD'S SILENT *"WOODCUT NOVELS"* ARE POWERFUL MODERN FABLES, NOW *PRAISED* BY COMICS ARTISTS, BUT SELDOM RECOGNIZED **AS** COMICS.

FROM WARD'S *GOD'S MAN*, 1929



FROM FRANK MASEREEL'S *PASSIONATE JOURNEY*, 1919.



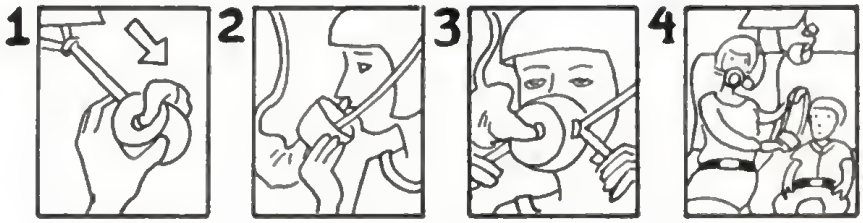
IF WE DON'T EXCLUDE *PHOTOGRAPHY* FROM OUR DEFINITION, THEN HALF OF *AMERICA* HAS BEEN IN COMICS AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.



IN *SOME* COUNTRIES, PHOTO-COMICS ARE, IN FACT, QUITE *POPULAR*.

MEANWHILE, *PICTURES IN SEQUENCE* ARE FINALLY BEING RECOGNIZED AS THE EXCELLENT *COMMUNICATION TOOL* THAT THEY ARE, BUT ***STILL*** NOBODY REFERS TO THEM AS *COMICS!* "*DIAGRAMS*" SOUNDS MORE *DIGNIFIED*, I SUPPOSE.





FROM *STAINED GLASS WINDOWS* SHOWING BIBLICAL SCENES IN ORDER TO *MONET'S SERIES PAINTINGS*, TO YOUR *CAR OWNER'S MANUAL*, COMICS TURN UP *ALL OVER* WHEN *SEQUENTIAL ART* IS EMPLOYED AS A DEFINITION.

THANKS TO MATT FEAZELL FOR THE SUGGESTIONS.

com·ics (kom'iks) **n.** plural in form, used with a singular verb. **1.** Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.

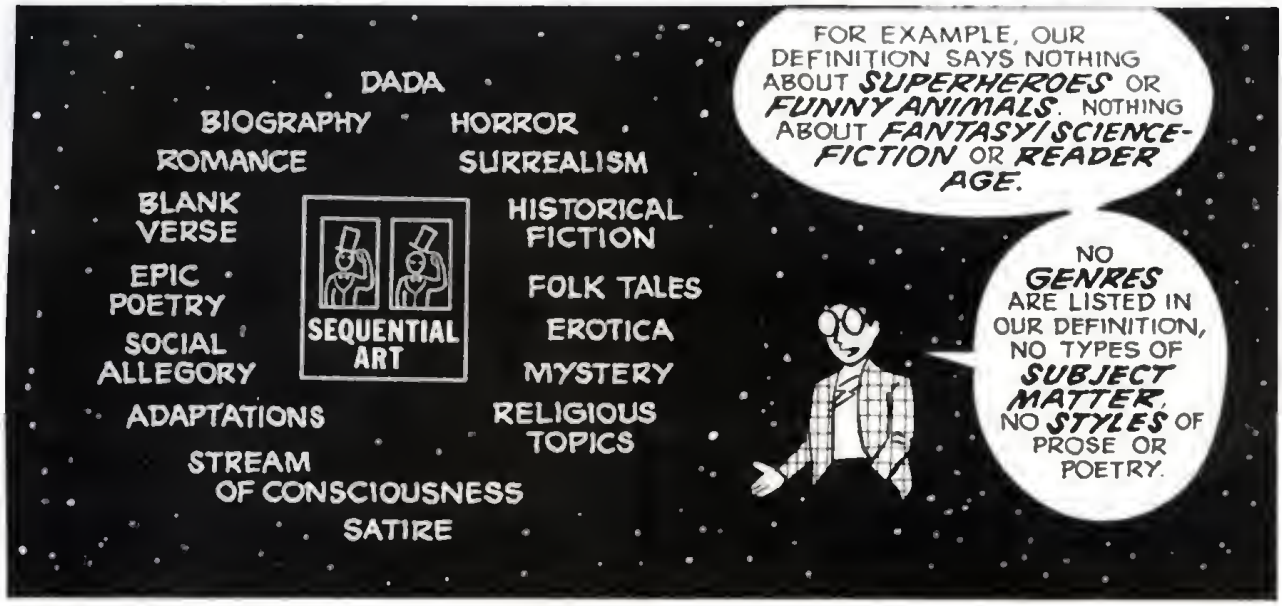
FOR ALL THE DOORS THAT OUR DEFINITION *OPENS*, THERE IS ONE WHICH IT *CLOSES*.

SINGLE PANELS LIKE *THIS* ONE ARE OFTEN *LUMPED IN* WITH COMICS, YET THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SEQUENCE OF *ONE!*

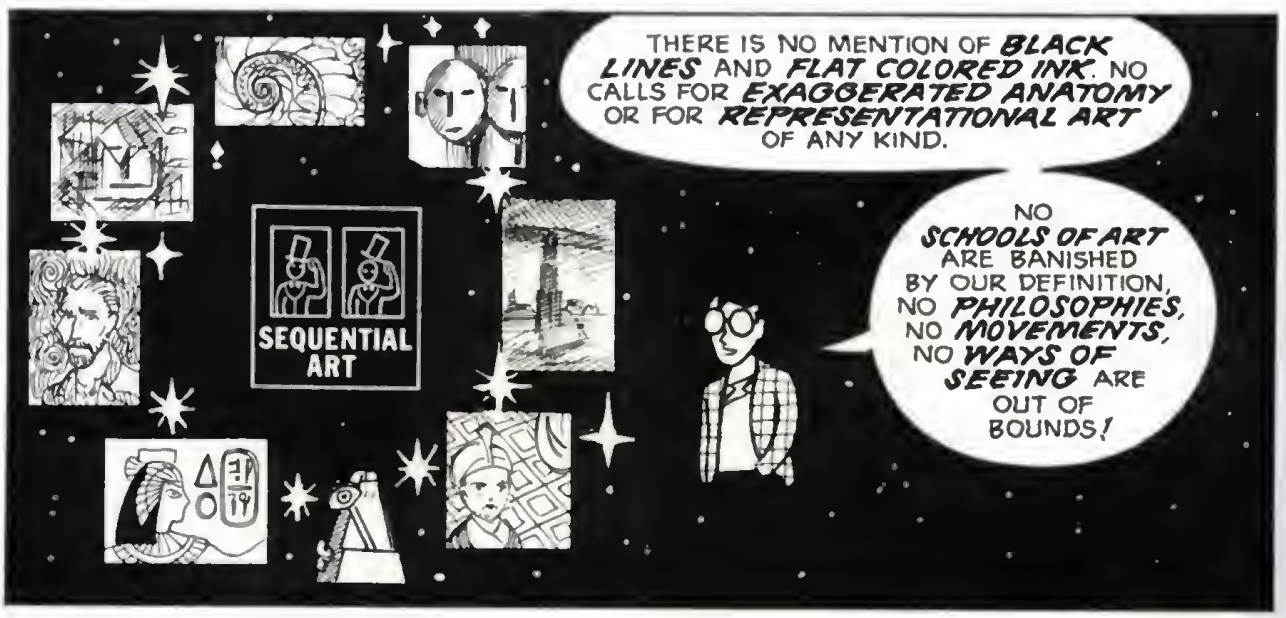
"Mommy, why ain't I Juxtaposed?"

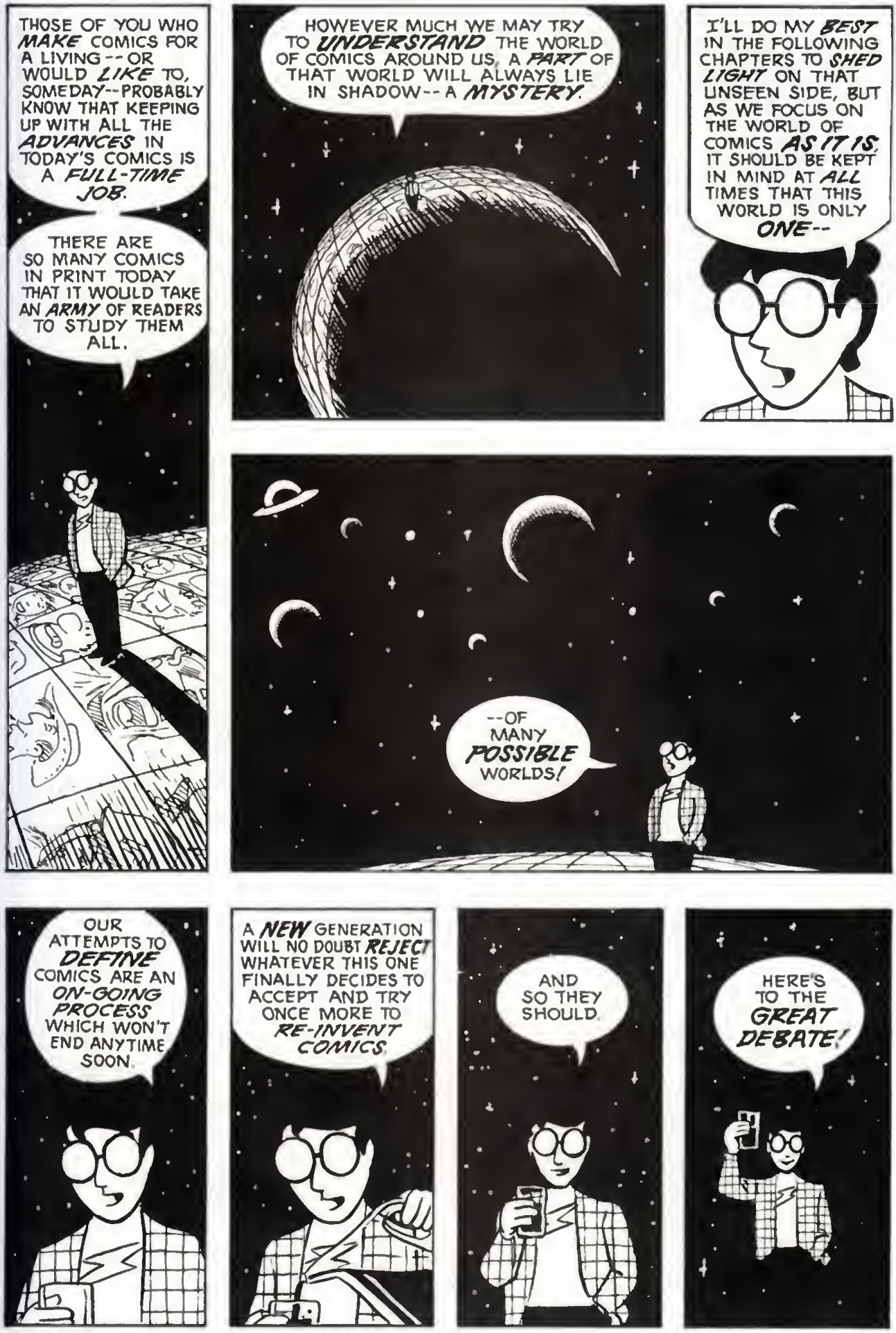
SUCH SINGLE PANELS MIGHT BE CLASSIFIED AS "*COMIC ART*" IN THE SENSE THAT THEY DERIVE PART OF THEIR *VISUAL VOCABULARY* FROM COMICS--


BUT I SAY THEY'RE NO MORE COMICS THAN THIS STILL OF HUMPHREY BOGART IS FILM!
HI, BOGEY.
THEY ARE CARTOONS, AS AM I, AND THERE IS A LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMICS AND CARTOONS.
--BUT THEY ARE NOT THE SAME THING! ONE IS AN APPROACH TO PICTURE-MAKING-- A STYLE, IF YOU LIKE--WHILE THE OTHER IS A MEDIUM WHICH OFTEN EMPLOYS THAT APPROACH.
HEY!
MORE ON THIS LATER.
THIS SAME SINGLE PANEL MIGHT ALSO BE LABELLED COMICS FOR ITS JUXTAPOSITION OF WORDS AND PICTURES.
"Mommy, why ain't I Juxtaposed?"
A GREAT MAJORITY OF MODERN COMICS DO FEATURE WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION AND IT'S A SUBJECT WORTHY OF STUDY, BUT WHEN USED AS A DEFINITION FOR COMICS, I'VE FOUND IT TO BE A LITTLE TOO RESTRICTIVE FOR MY TASTE.
OF COURSE, IF ANYONE WANTS TO WRITE A BOOK TAKING THE OPPOSITE VIEW, YOU CAN BET I'LL BE THE FIRST IN LINE TO BUY A COPY!
IF COMICS' SPECTACULARLY VARIED PAST IS ANY INDICATION, COMICS' FUTURE WILL BE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT USING THE STANDARDS OF THE PRESENT.
BUT OUR DEFINITION CAN OFFER US SOME CLUES.
1980
1990
2000
2010
2020
2030
2040
AND THIS TIME, THE SECRET IS NOT IN WHAT THE DEFINITION SAYS BUT IN WHAT IT DOESN'T SAY!
SEQUENTIAL ART


DADA
BIOGRAPHY
HORROR
ROMANCE
SURREALISM
BLANK VERSE
HISTORICAL FICTION
EPIC POETRY
FOLK TALES
SOCIAL ALLEGORY
EROTICA
MYSTERY
ADAPTATIONS
RELIGIOUS TOPICS
STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SATIRE
SEQUENTIAL ART
FOR EXAMPLE, OUR DEFINITION SAYS NOTHING ABOUT SUPERHEROES OR FUNNY ANIMALS. NOTHING ABOUT FANTASY/SCIENCE-FICTION OR READER AGE.
NO GENRES ARE LISTED IN OUR DEFINITION, NO TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER, NO STYLES OF PROSE OR POETRY.

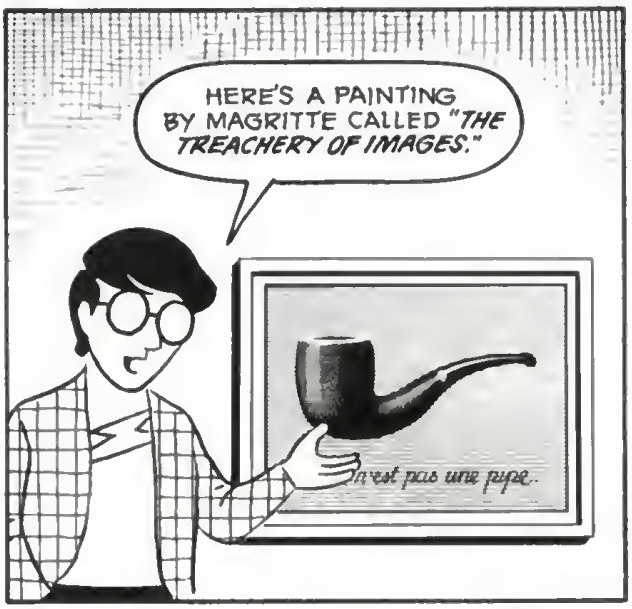

NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT PAPER AND INK. NO PRINTING PROCESS IS MENTIONED. PRINTING ITSELF ISN'T EVEN SPECIFIED! NOTHING IS SAID ABOUT TECHNICAL PENS OR BRISTOL BOARD OR WINDSOR & NEWTON FINEST SABLE SERIES 7 NUMBER TWO BRUSHES!
NO MATERIALS ARE RULED OUT BY OUR DEFINITION. NO TOOLS ARE PROHIBITED.
SEQUENTIAL ART
SPRAY PAINT

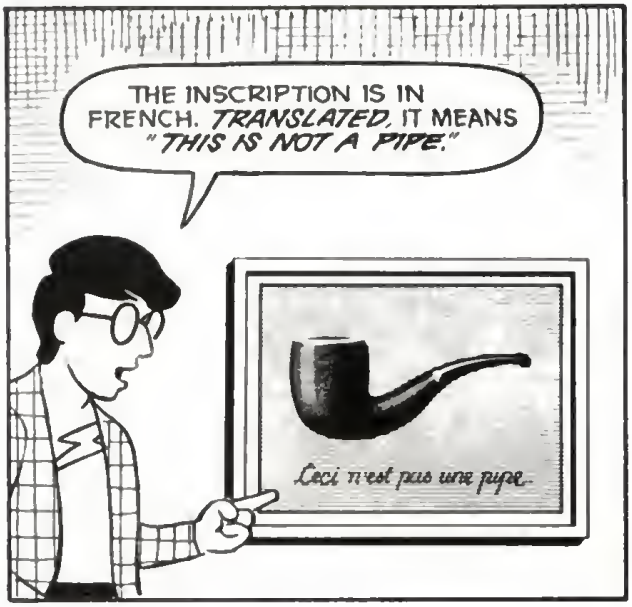

THERE IS NO MENTION OF BLACK LINES AND FLAT COLORED INK. NO CALLS FOR EXAGGERATED ANATOMY OR FOR REPRESENTATIONAL ART OF ANY KIND.
NO SCHOOLS OF ART ARE BANISHED BY OUR DEFINITION, NO PHILOSOPHIES, NO MOVEMENTS, NO WAYS OF SEEING ARE OUT OF BOUNDS!
SEQUENTIAL ART


THOSE OF YOU WHO MAKE COMICS FOR A LIVING -- OR WOULD LIKE TO, SOMEDAY -- PROBABLY KNOW THAT KEEPING UP WITH ALL THE ADVANCES IN TODAY'S COMICS IS A FULL-TIME JOB.
THERE ARE SO MANY COMICS IN PRINT TODAY THAT IT WOULD TAKE AN ARMY OF READERS TO STUDY THEM ALL.
HOWEVER MUCH WE MAY TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD OF COMICS AROUND US, A PART OF THAT WORLD WILL ALWAYS LIE IN SHADOW -- A MYSTERY.
I'LL DO MY BEST IN THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS TO SHED LIGHT ON THAT UNSEEN SIDE, BUT AS WE FOCUS ON THE WORLD OF COMICS AS IT IS, IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND AT ALL TIMES THAT THIS WORLD IS ONLY ONE --
--OF MANY POSSIBLE WORLDS!
OUR ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE COMICS ARE AN ON-GOING PROCESS WHICH WON'T END ANYTIME SOON.
A NEW GENERATION WILL NO DOUBT REJECT WHATEVER THIS ONE FINALLY DECIDES TO ACCEPT AND TRY ONCE MORE TO RE-INVENT COMICS.
AND SO THEY SHOULD.
HERE'S TO THE GREAT DEBATE!

CHAPTER TWO

THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS.









SEE PAGE 216 FOR MORE INFORMATION.


WELL, ACTUALLY, THAT'S WRONG. THIS IS NOT A PAINTING OF A PIPE, THIS IS A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
N'EST-CE PAS?


NOPE. WRONG AGAIN. IT'S A PRINTED COPY OF A DRAWING OF A PAINTING OF A PIPE.
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.


TEN COPIES, ACTUALLY.
SIX, IF YOU FOLD THE PAGES BACK.
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.


Ceci n'est pas une pipe.


DO YOU HEAR WHAT I'M SAYING?
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.


IF YOU DO, HAVE YOUR EARS CHECKED, BECAUSE NO ONE SAID A WORD.
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.



THIS IS NOT A MAN.



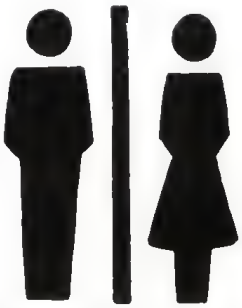
THESE ARE NOT IDEAS.



THIS IS NOT A COUNTRY.



THIS IS NOT A LEAF



THESE ARE NOT PEOPLE.



THIS IS NOT MUSIC.



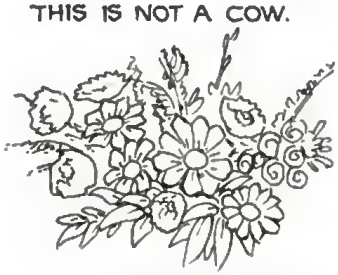
THIS IS NOT A COW.



THIS IS NOT MY VOICE.



THIS IS NOT SOUND.



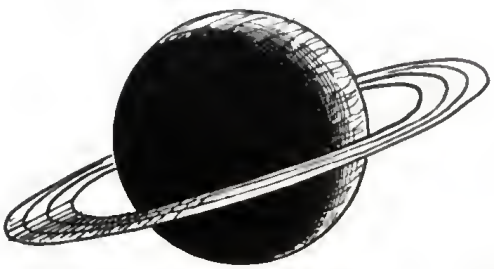
THESE ARE NOT FLOWERS.



THIS IS NOT ME.



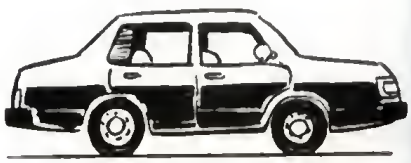
THIS IS NOT LAW.



THIS IS NOT A PLANET.



THIS IS NOT FOOD.



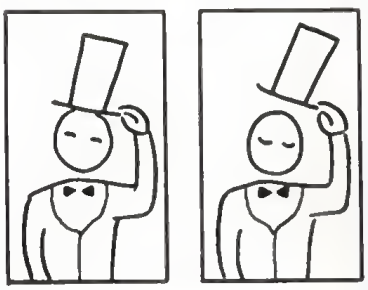
THIS IS NOT A CAR.



THIS IS NOT A COMPANY.

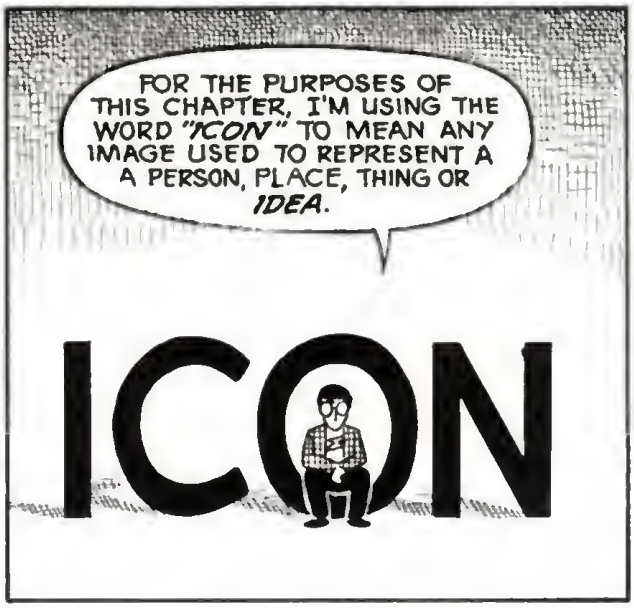


THIS IS NOT A FACE.



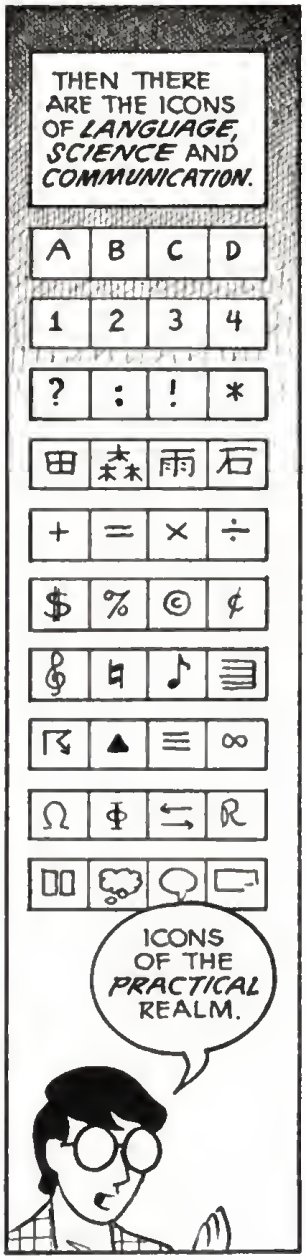
THESE ARE NOT SEPARATE MOMENTS.


NOW, THE WORD ICON MEANS MANY THINGS.
THIS IS PAPER
THIS IS INK ON PAPER

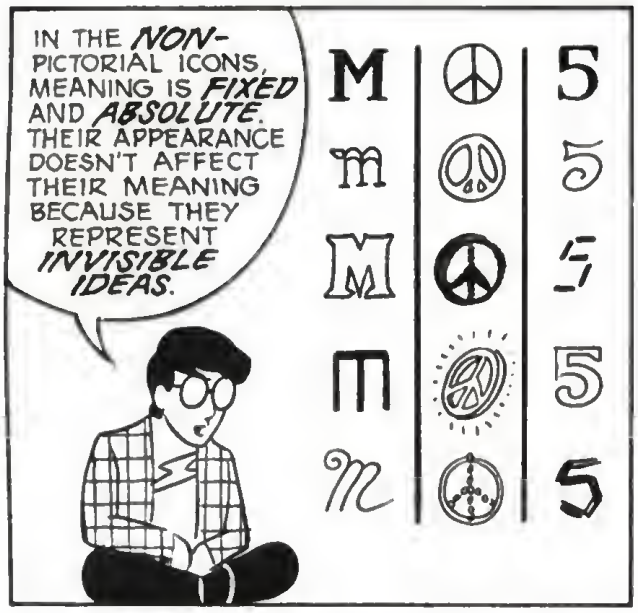

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS CHAPTER, I'M USING THE WORD "ICON" TO MEAN ANY IMAGE USED TO REPRESENT A A PERSON, PLACE, THING OR IDEA.
ICON

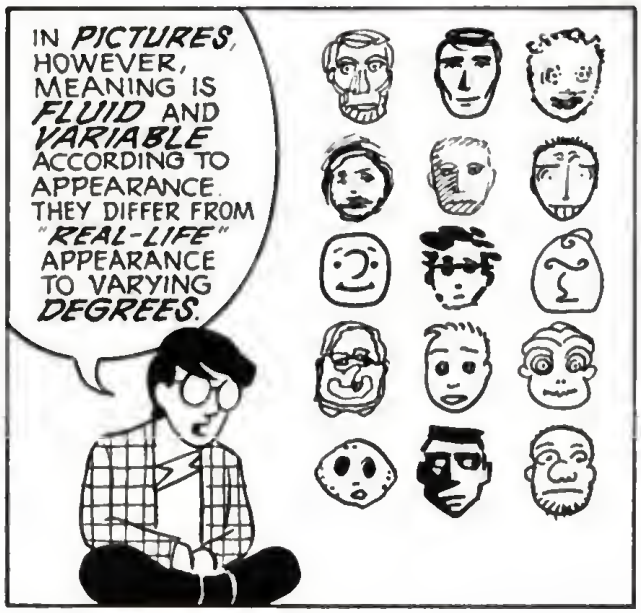

THAT'S A BIT BROADER THAN THE DEFINITION IN MY DICTIONARY, BUT IT'S THE CLOSEST THING TO WHAT I NEED HERE.
"SYMBOL" IS A BIT TOO LOADED FOR ME.


THE SORTS OF IMAGES WE USUALLY CALL SYMBOLS ARE ONE CATEGORY OF ICON, HOWEVER.
Exxon
THESE ARE THE IMAGES WE USE TO REPRESENT CONCEPTS, IDEAS AND PHILOSOPHIES.

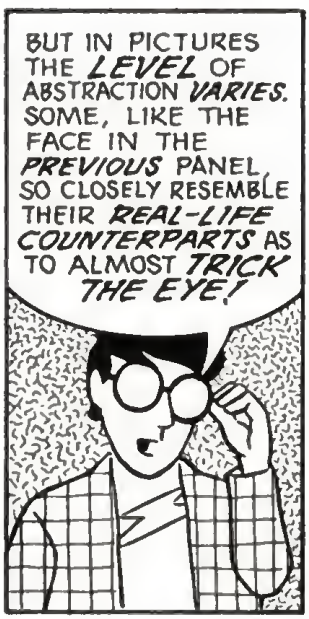

THEN THERE ARE THE ICONS OF LANGUAGE, SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION.
A B C D
1 2 3 4
? : ! *
+ = × ÷
$ % © ¢
ICONS OF THE PRACTICAL REALM.


AND FINALLY, THE ICONS WE CALL PICTURES: IMAGES DESIGNED TO ACTUALLY RESEMBLE THEIR SUBJECTS.
BUT AS RESEMBLANCE VARIES, SO DOES THE LEVEL OF ICONIC CONTENT.
OR TO PUT IT SOMEWHAT CLUMSILY, SOME PICTURES ARE JUST MORE ICONIC THAN OTHERS.


IN THE NON-PICTORIAL ICONS, MEANING IS FIXED AND ABSOLUTE. THEIR APPEARANCE DOESN'T AFFECT THEIR MEANING BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT INVISIBLE IDEAS.
M
m
M
m
n
5
5
5
5
5

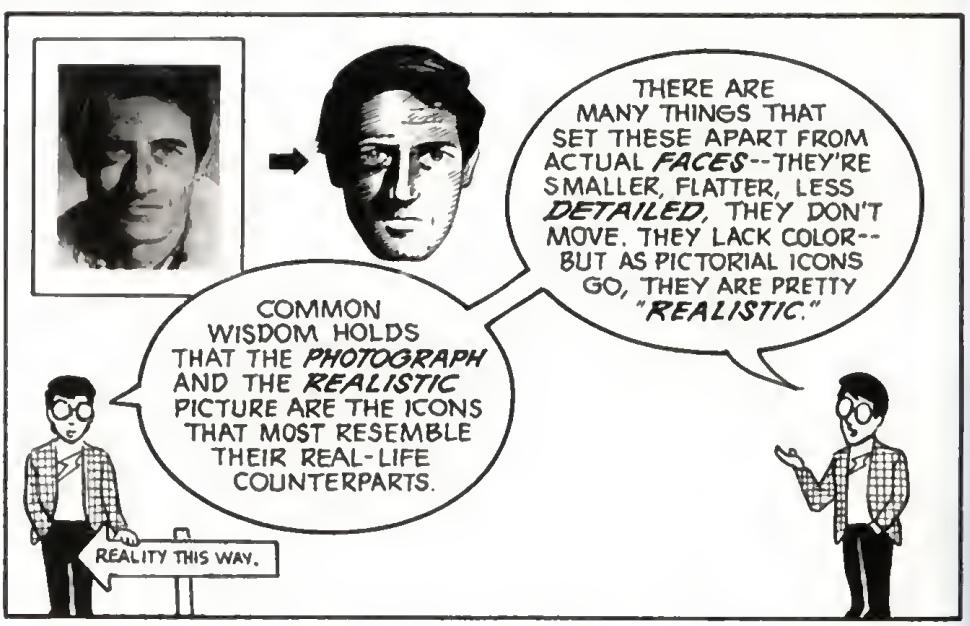

IN PICTURES, HOWEVER, MEANING IS FLUID AND VARIABLE ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE. THEY DIFFER FROM "REAL-LIFE" APPEARANCE TO VARYING DEGREES.

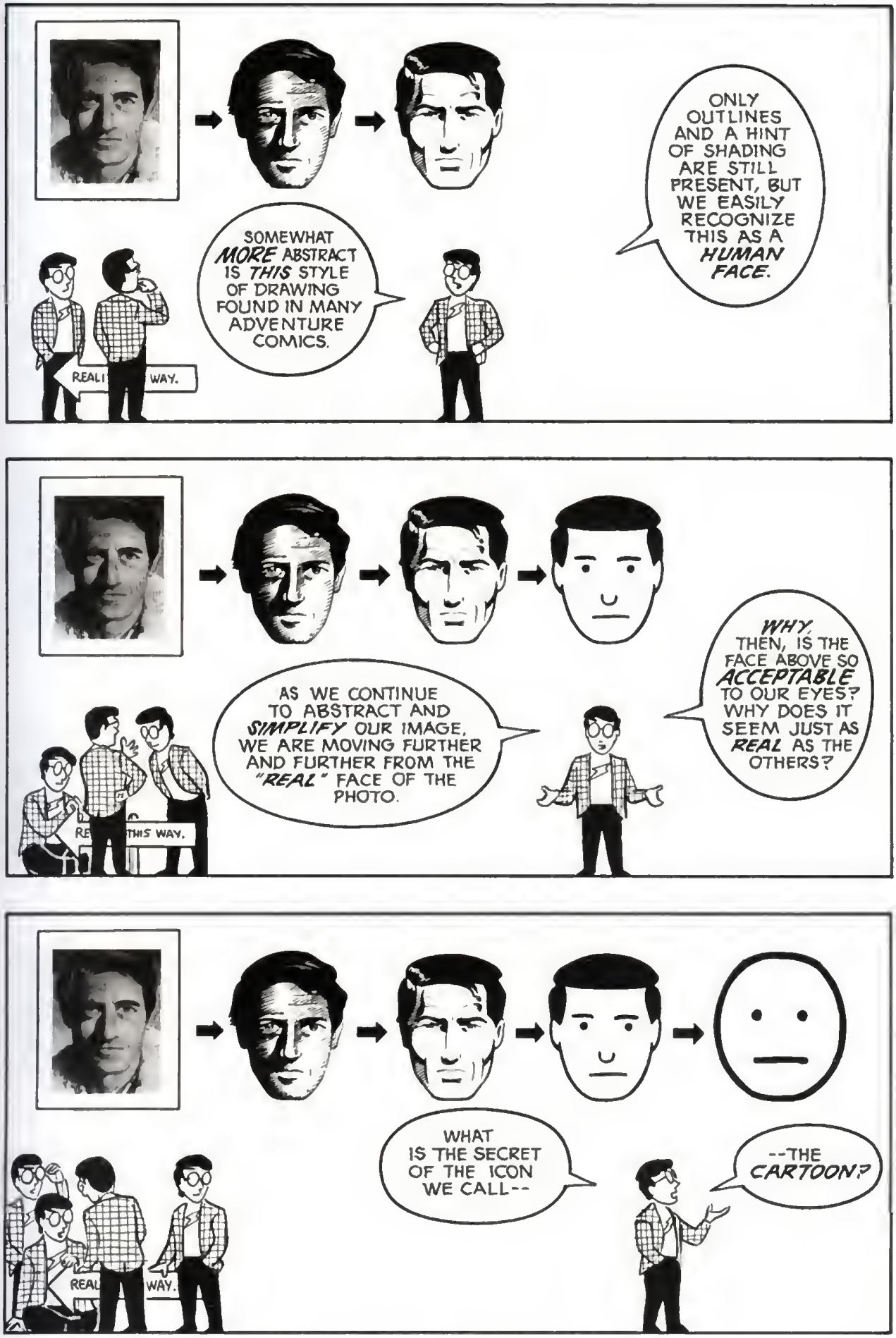

WORDS ARE TOTALLY ABSTRACT ICONS. THAT IS, THEY BEAR NO RESEMBLANCE AT ALL TO THE REAL McCOY.
EYE

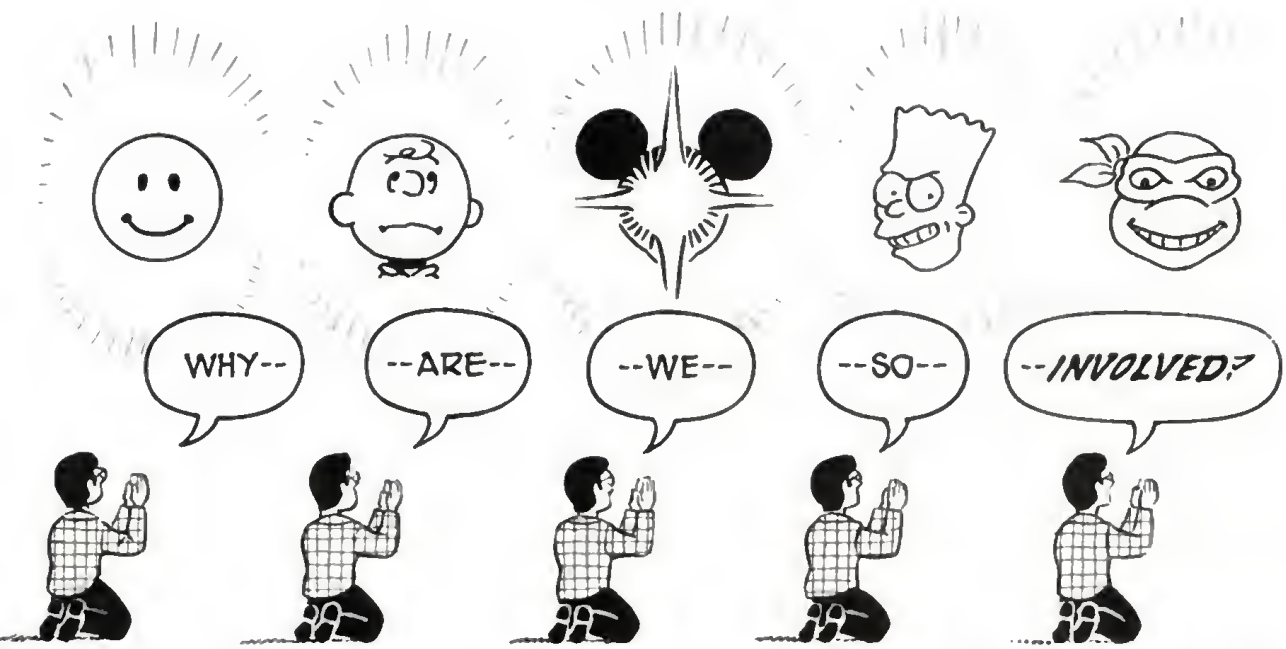

BUT IN PICTURES THE LEVEL OF ABSTRACTION VARIES. SOME, LIKE THE FACE IN THE PREVIOUS PANEL, SO CLOSELY RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS AS TO ALMOST TRICK THE EYE!


OTHERS, LIKE YOURS TRULY, ARE QUITE A BIT MORE ABSTRACT AND, IN FACT, ARE VERY MUCH UNLIKE ANY HUMAN FACE YOU'VE EVER SEEN!

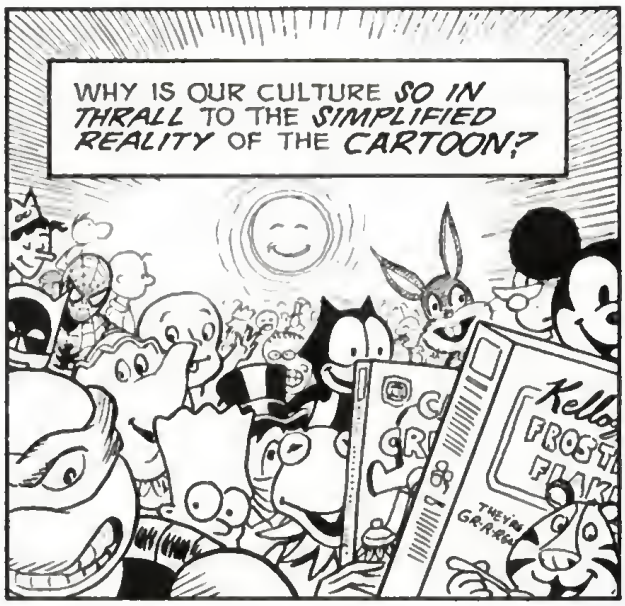

LET'S SEE IF WE CAN PUT THESE PICTORIAL ICONS IN SOME SORT OF ORDER.


COMMON WISDOM HOLDS THAT THE PHOTOGRAPH AND THE REALISTIC PICTURE ARE THE ICONS THAT MOST RESEMBLE THEIR REAL-LIFE COUNTERPARTS.
THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT SET THESE APART FROM ACTUAL FACES--THEY'RE SMALLER, FLATTER, LESS DETAILED, THEY DON'T MOVE. THEY LACK COLOR--BUT AS PICTORIAL ICONS GO, THEY ARE PRETTY "REALISTIC."
REALITY THIS WAY.

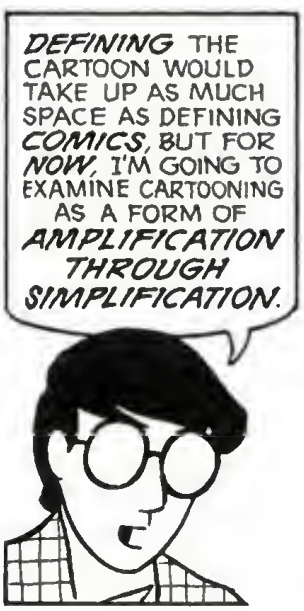

SOMEWHAT MORE ABSTRACT IS THIS STYLE OF DRAWING FOUND IN MANY ADVENTURE COMICS.
ONLY OUTLINES AND A HINT OF SHADING ARE STILL PRESENT, BUT WE EASILY RECOGNIZE THIS AS A HUMAN FACE.
AS WE CONTINUE TO ABSTRACT AND SIMPLIFY OUR IMAGE, WE ARE MOVING FURTHER AND FURTHER FROM THE "REAL" FACE OF THE PHOTO.
WHY, THEN, IS THE FACE ABOVE SO ACCEPTABLE TO OUR EYES? WHY DOES IT SEEM JUST AS REAL AS THE OTHERS?
WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE ICON WE CALL--
--THE CARTOON?

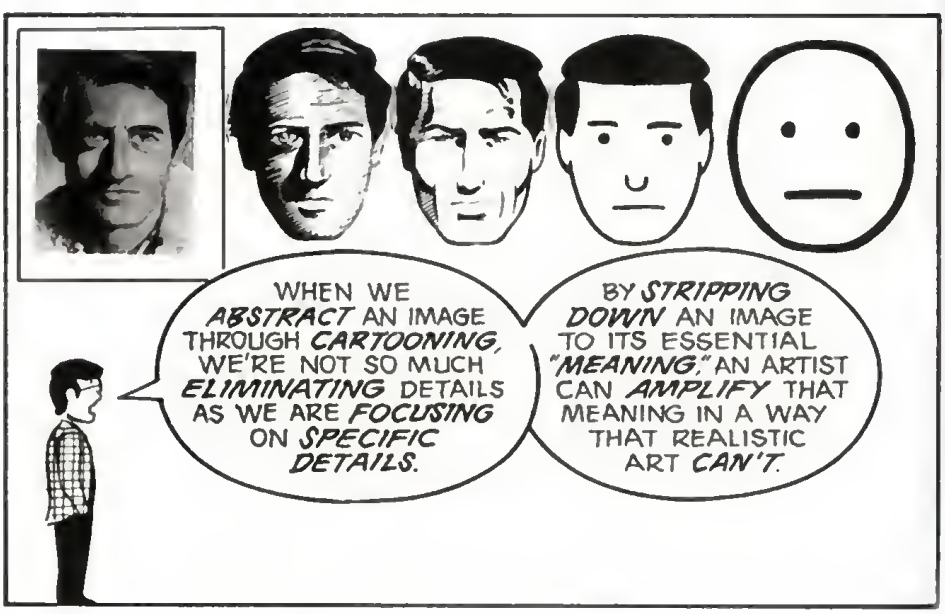






SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION.





FILM CRITICS WILL SOMETIMES DESCRIBE A *LIVE-ACTION* FILM AS A "CARTOON" TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE STRIPPED-DOWN *INTENSITY* OF A SIMPLE STORY OR VISUAL STYLE.

THOUGH THE TERM IS OFTEN USED *DISPARAGINGLY*, IT CAN BE EQUALLY WELL APPLIED TO MANY *TIME-TESTED CLASSICS*. SIMPLIFYING CHARACTERS AND IMAGES TOWARD A *PURPOSE* CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR STORYTELLING IN *ANY* MEDIUM.

CARTOONING ISN'T JUST A WAY OF *DRAWING*, IT'S A WAY OF *SEEING!*

FOLLOW! FOLLOW!

THE ABILITY OF CARTOONS TO *FOCUS* OUR ATTENTION ON AN IDEA IS, I THINK, AN IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR SPECIAL POWER, BOTH IN COMICS AND IN DRAWING GENERALLY.



ONE



A FEW



THOUSANDS



MILLIONS



(NEARLY) ALL

ANOTHER IS THE *UNIVERSALITY* OF CARTOON IMAGERY. THE MORE CARTOONY A FACE IS, FOR INSTANCE, THE MORE PEOPLE IT COULD BE SAID TO *DESCRIBE*.

BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING *MORE* AT WORK IN OUR MINDS WHEN WE VIEW A CARTOON--ESPECIALLY OF A HUMAN FACE--WHICH WARRANTS FURTHER INVESTIGATION.

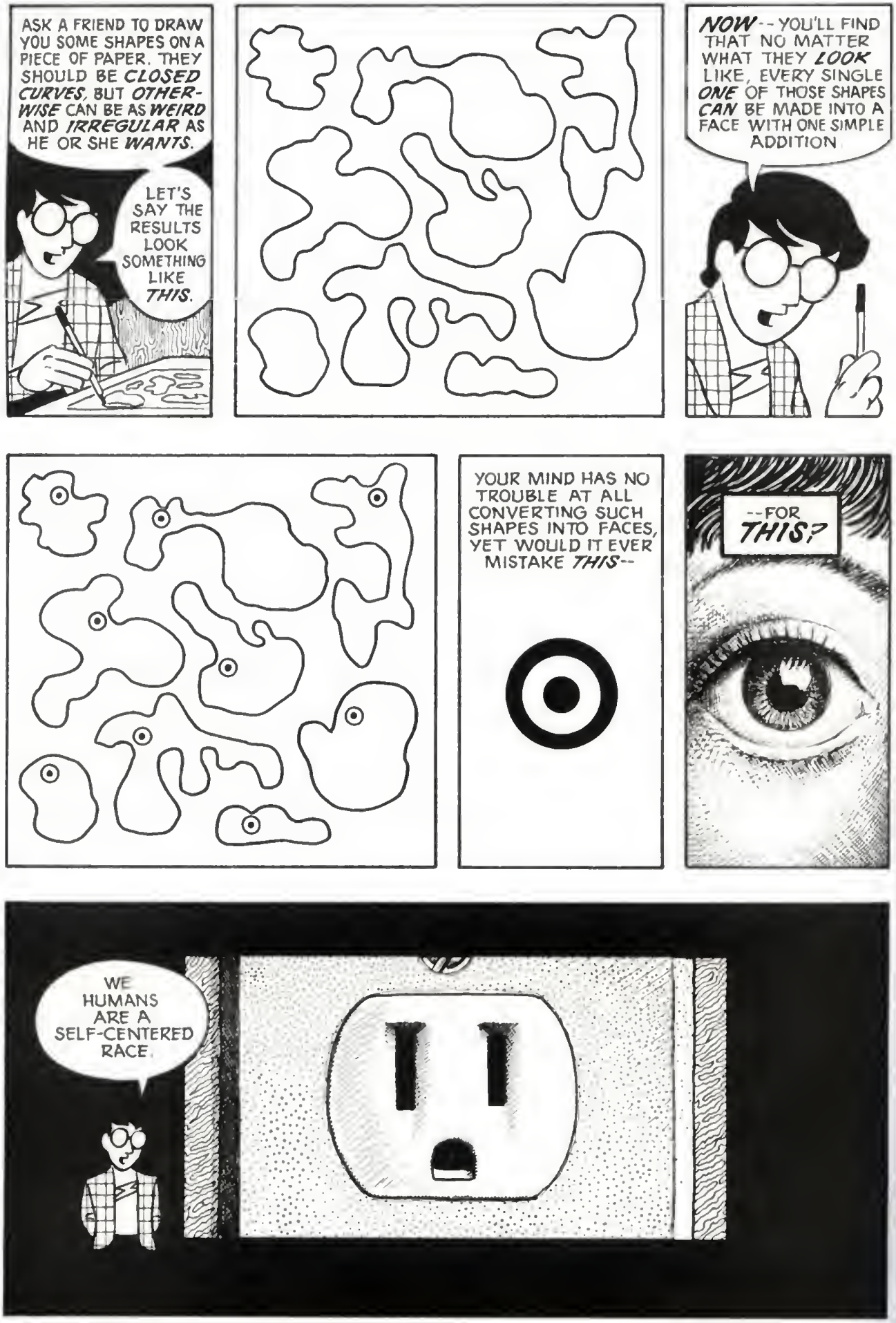
WHAT ARE YOU

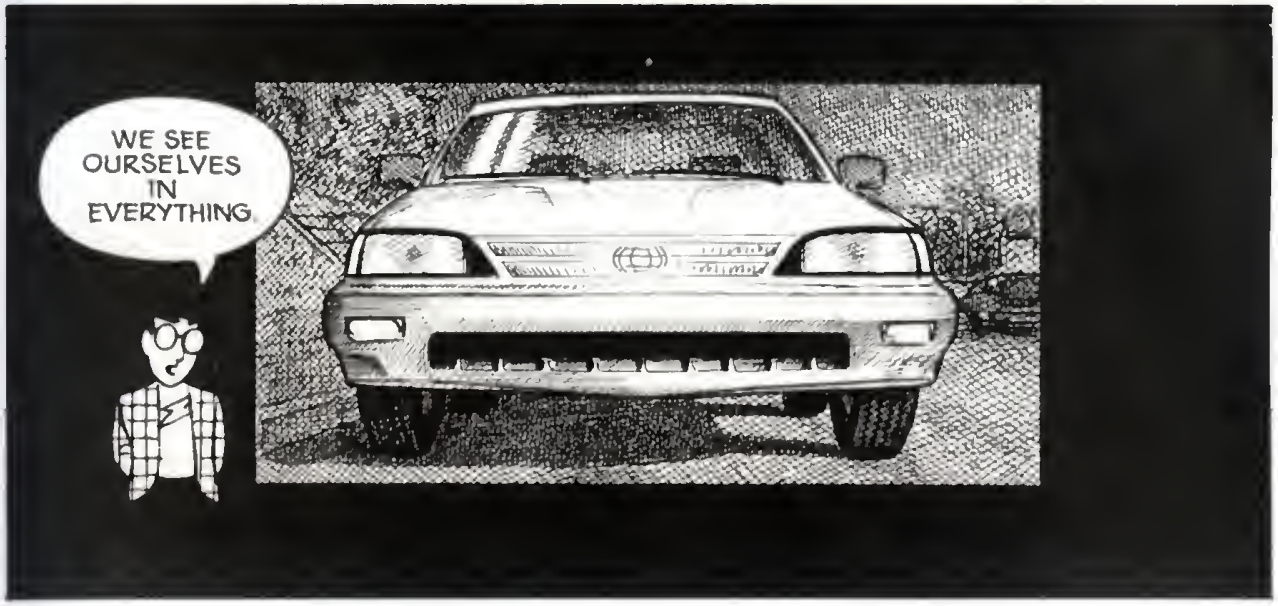


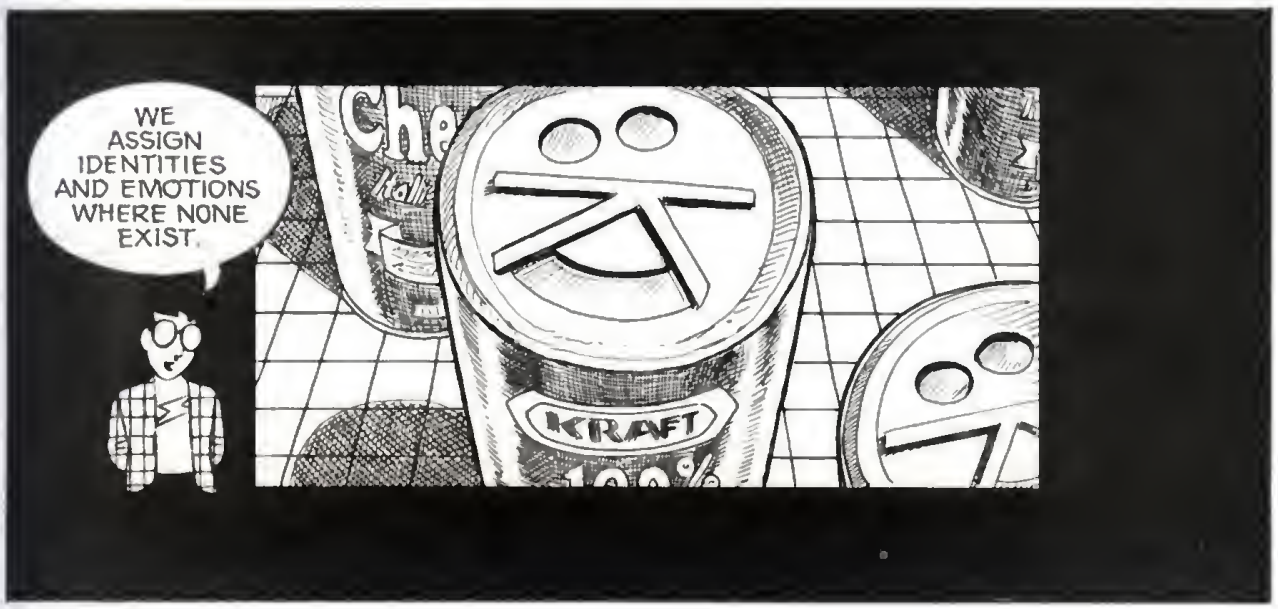
REALLY SEEING?

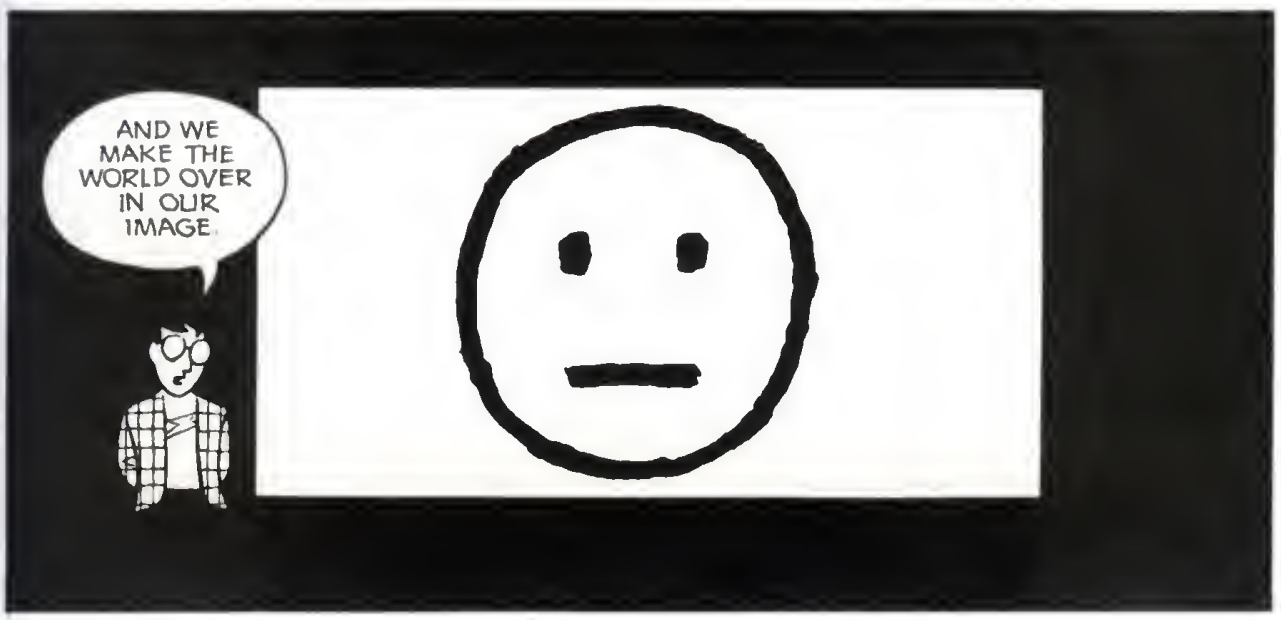
THE FACT THAT YOUR MIND IS *CAPABLE* OF TAKING A *CIRCLE, TWO DOTS* AND A *LINE* AND TURNING THEM INTO A *FACE* IS NOTHING SHORT OF *INCREDIBLE!*

BUT STILL *MORE* INCREDIBLE IS THE FACT THAT YOU CANNOT *AVOID* SEEING A FACE HERE. YOUR MIND WON'T *LET* YOU!


ASK A FRIEND TO DRAW YOU SOME SHAPES ON A PIECE OF PAPER. THEY SHOULD BE CLOSED CURVES, BUT OTHERWISE CAN BE AS WEIRD AND IRREGULAR AS HE OR SHE WANTS.
LET'S SAY THE RESULTS LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS.
NOW--YOU'LL FIND THAT NO MATTER WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THOSE SHAPES CAN BE MADE INTO A FACE WITH ONE SIMPLE ADDITION
YOUR MIND HAS NO TROUBLE AT ALL CONVERTING SUCH SHAPES INTO FACES, YET WOULD IT EVER MISTAKE THIS--
--FOR THIS?
WE HUMANS ARE A SELF-CENTERED RACE.


WE SEE OURSELVES IN EVERYTHING.


WE ASSIGN IDENTITIES AND EMOTIONS WHERE NONE EXIST.
KRAFT


AND WE MAKE THE WORLD OVER IN OUR IMAGE.

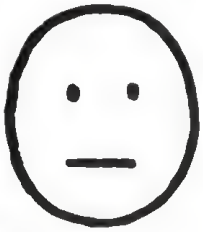

THINK OF YOUR FACE AS A MASK.
THAT'S WHAT IT *IS*, AFTER ALL
A MASK.
FACING *OUTWARD*.
WORN FROM THE DAY YOU WERE BORN.
SLAVE TO YOUR EVERY MENTAL COMMAND.
SEEN BY EVERYONE YOU MEET.
BUT NEVER BY *YOU*.
OPEN ITS EYES NOW.
JUST *THINK* IT THE MASK WILL OBEY.


ALL SET?
GOOD.
NOW, SMILE.
C'MON, NOBODY'S LOOKING.
GOOD. NOW WHAT CHANGED WHEN YOU SMILED? WHAT DID YOU SEE?
NOTHING. RIGHT.
YET, YOU KNOW YOU SMILED! NOT JUST BECAUSE YOU FELT YOUR CHEEKS COMPRESS OR THE CRINKLING AROUND YOUR EYES!
YOU KNOW YOU SMILED BECAUSE YOU TRUSTED THIS MASK CALLED YOUR FACE TO RESPOND!
BUT THE FACE YOU SEE IN YOUR MIND IS NOT THE SAME AS OTHERS SEE!
WHEN TWO PEOPLE INTERRACT, THEY USUALLY LOOK DIRECTLY AT ONE ANOTHER, SEEING THEIR PARTNER'S FEATURES IN VIVID DETAIL.

EACH ONE *ALSO* SUSTAINS A CONSTANT AWARENESS OF HIS OR HER *OWN* FACE, BUT *THIS* MIND-PICTURE IS NOT NEARLY SO VIVID; JUST A SKETCHY ARRANGEMENT... A SENSE OF SHAPE... A SENSE OF *GENERAL PLACEMENT.*



SOMETHING AS *SIMPLE* AND AS *BASIC--*



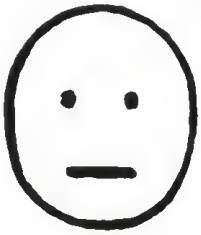
--AS A *CARTOON.*

THUS, WHEN YOU LOOK AT A PHOTO OR REALISTIC DRAWING OF A FACE--



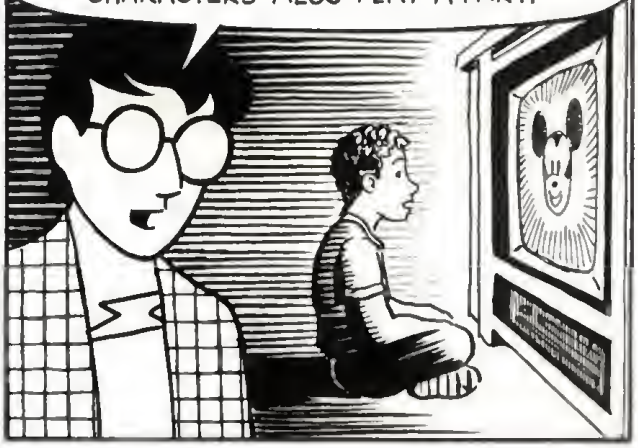
--YOU SEE IT AS THE FACE OF *ANOTHER.*

BUT WHEN YOU ENTER THE WORLD OF THE *CARTOON--*

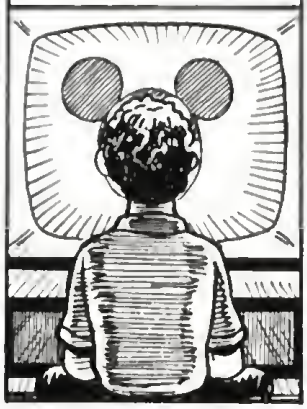


--YOU SEE *YOURSELF.*

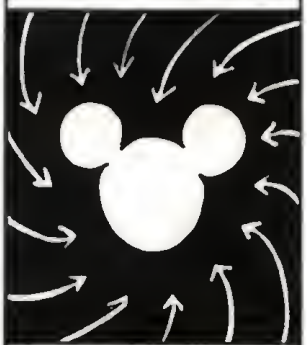
I BELIEVE THIS IS THE *PRIMARY CAUSE* OF OUR CHILDHOOD FASCINATION WITH *CARTOONS,* THOUGH OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS *UNIVERSAL IDENTIFICATION, SIMPLICITY* AND THE *CHILDLIKE FEATURES* OF MANY CARTOON CHARACTERS ALSO PLAY A PART.



THE CARTOON IS A *VACUUM* INTO WHICH OUR *IDENTITY* AND *AWARENESS* ARE *PULLED...*



...AN *EMPTY SHELL* THAT WE INHABIT WHICH *ENABLES* US TO TRAVEL IN *ANOTHER REALM.*

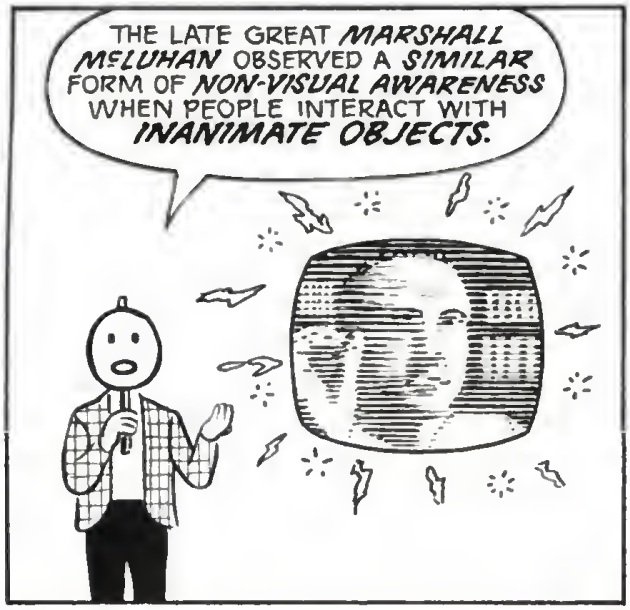


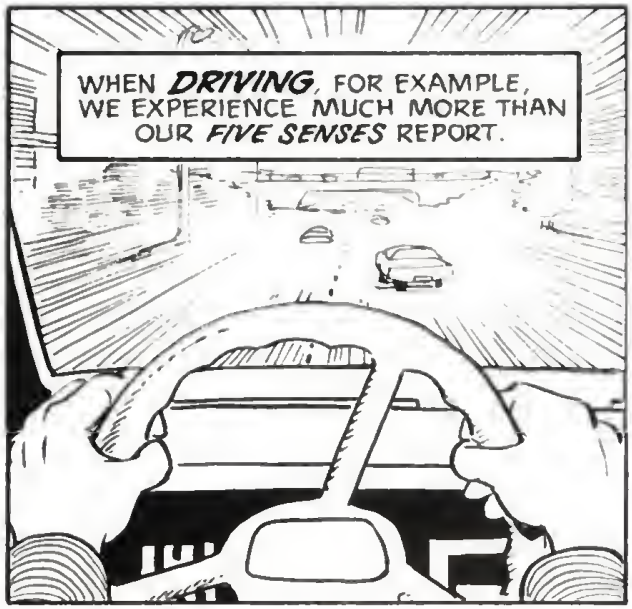
WE DON'T JUST *OBSERVE* THE CARTOON, WE *BECOME* IT!



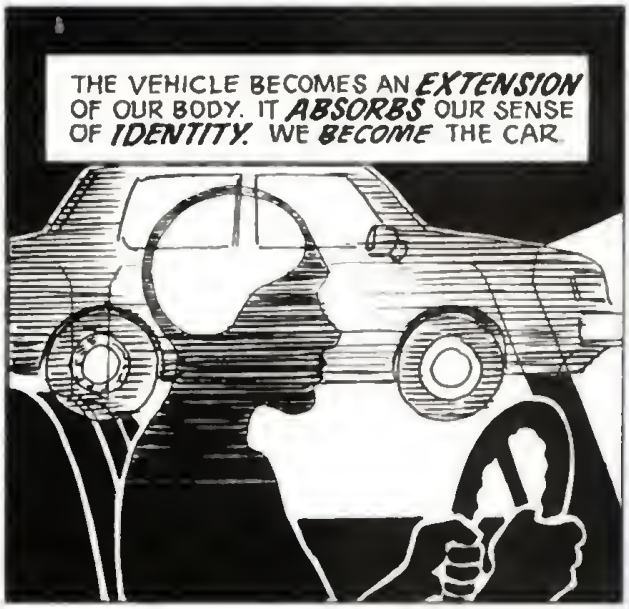


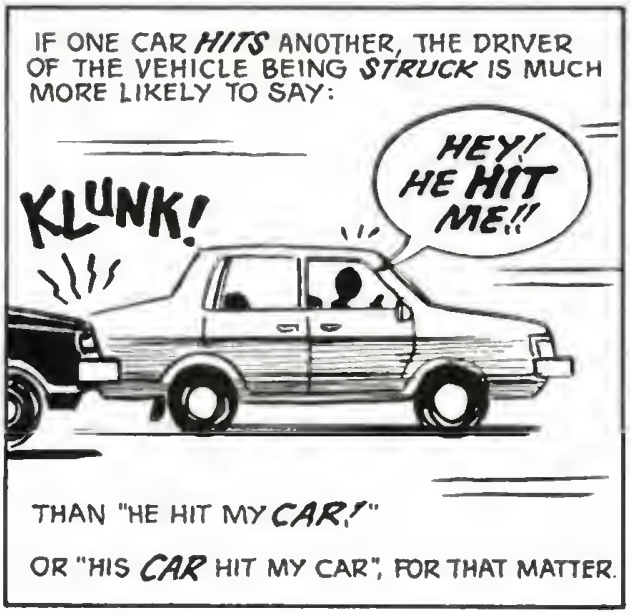

I DOUBT IT! YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR TOO AWARE OF THE MESSENGER TO FULLY RECEIVE THE MESSAGE!
APART FROM WHAT LITTLE I TOLD YOU ABOUT MYSELF IN CHAPTER ONE, I'M PRACTICALLY A BLANK SLATE!
IT WOULD NEVER EVEN OCCUR TO YOU TO WONDER WHAT MY POLITICS ARE, OR WHAT I HAD FOR LUNCH OR WHERE I GOT THIS SILLY OUTFIT!
I'M JUST A LITTLE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD.
A CONCEPT.
YOU GIVE ME LIFE BY READING THIS BOOK AND BY "FILLING UP" THIS VERY ICONIC (CARTOONY) FORM.
WHO I AM IS IRRELEVANT. I'M JUST A LITTLE PIECE OF YOU.
BUT IF WHO I AM MATTERS LESS, MAYBE WHAT I SAY WILL MATTER MORE.
THAT'S THE THEORY, ANYWAY.
SO FAR, WE'VE ONLY DISCUSSED FACES, BUT THE PHENOMENON OF NON-VISUAL SELF-AWARENESS CAN, TO A LESSER DEGREE, STILL APPLY TO OUR WHOLE BODIES. AFTER ALL, DO WE NEED TO SEE OUR HANDS TO KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING?
THERE'S MORE, TOO!

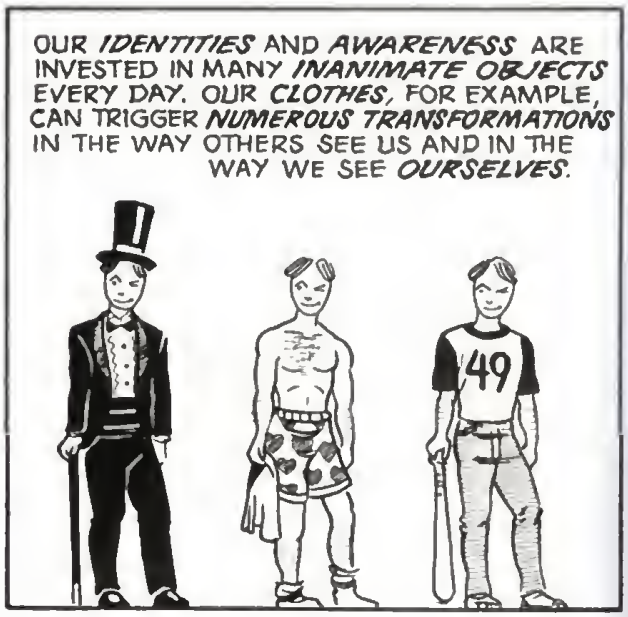

THE LATE GREAT MARSHALL McLUHAN OBSERVED A SIMILAR FORM OF NON-VISUAL AWARENESS WHEN PEOPLE INTERACT WITH INANIMATE OBJECTS.

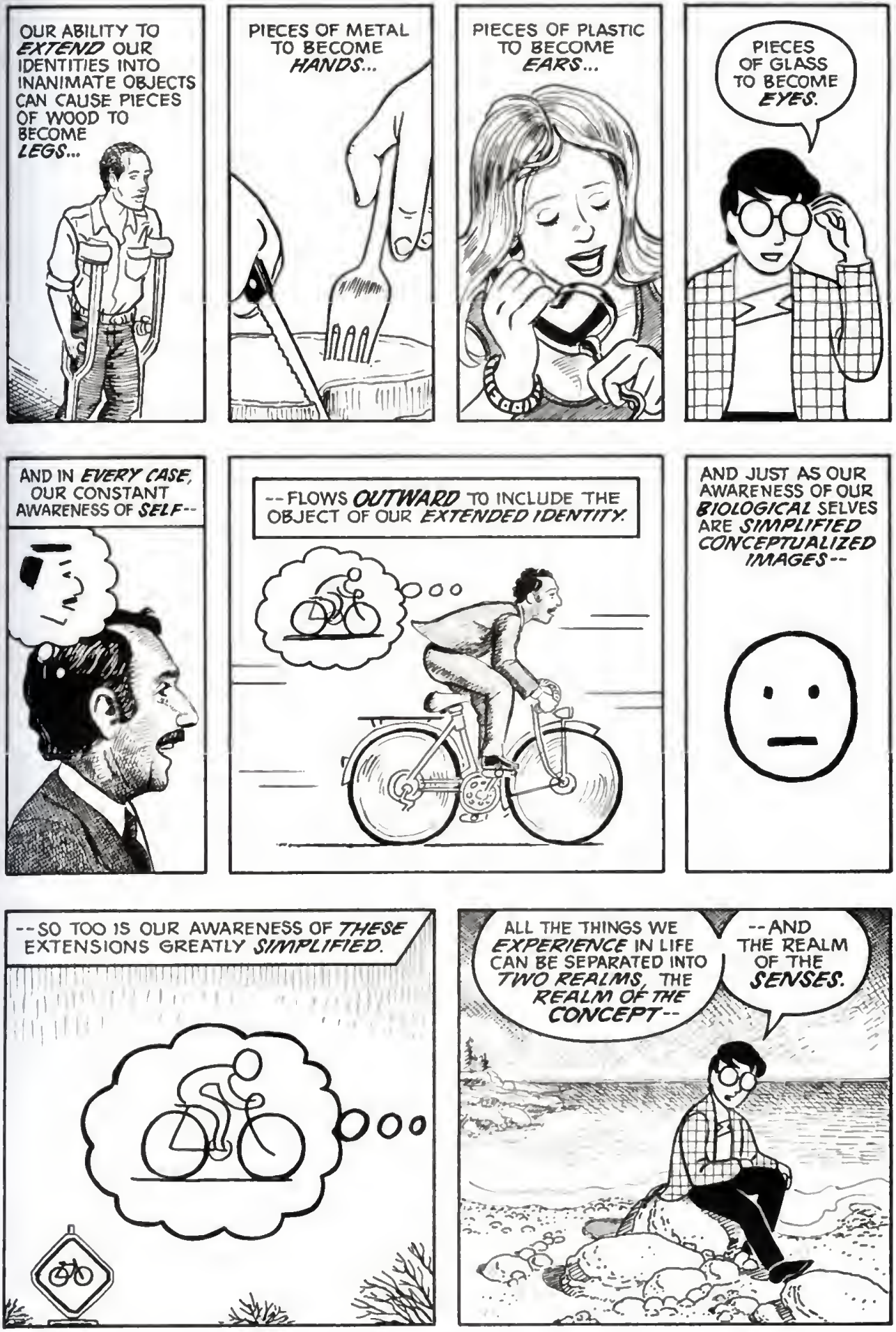

WHEN DRIVING, FOR EXAMPLE, WE EXPERIENCE MUCH MORE THAN OUR FIVE SENSES REPORT.


THE WHOLE CAR -- NOT JUST THE PARTS WE CAN SEE, FEEL AND HEAR -- IS VERY MUCH ON OUR MINDS AT ALL TIMES.


THE VEHICLE BECOMES AN EXTENSION OF OUR BODY. IT ABSORBS OUR SENSE OF IDENTITY. WE BECOME THE CAR.


IF ONE CAR HITS ANOTHER, THE DRIVER OF THE VEHICLE BEING STRUCK IS MUCH MORE LIKELY TO SAY:
KLUNK!
HEY! HE HIT ME!!
THAN "HE HIT MY CAR!"
OR "HIS CAR HIT MY CAR", FOR THAT MATTER.


OUR IDENTITIES AND AWARENESS ARE INVESTED IN MANY INANIMATE OBJECTS EVERY DAY. OUR CLOTHES, FOR EXAMPLE, CAN TRIGGER NUMEROUS TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE WAY OTHERS SEE US AND IN THE WAY WE SEE OURSELVES.
49


OUR ABILITY TO EXTEND OUR IDENTITIES INTO INANIMATE OBJECTS CAN CAUSE PIECES OF WOOD TO BECOME LEGS...
PIECES OF METAL TO BECOME HANDS...
PIECES OF PLASTIC TO BECOME EARS...
PIECES OF GLASS TO BECOME EYES.
AND IN EVERY CASE, OUR CONSTANT AWARENESS OF SELF--
--FLOWS OUTWARD TO INCLUDE THE OBJECT OF OUR EXTENDED IDENTITY.
AND JUST AS OUR AWARENESS OF OUR BIOLOGICAL SELVES ARE SIMPLIFIED CONCEPTUALIZED IMAGES--
--SO TOO IS OUR AWARENESS OF THESE EXTENSIONS GREATLY SIMPLIFIED.
ALL THE THINGS WE EXPERIENCE IN LIFE CAN BE SEPARATED INTO TWO REALMS, THE REALM OF THE CONCEPT--
--AND THE REALM OF THE SENSES.


OUR IDENTITIES BELONG *PERMANENTLY* TO THE *CONCEPTUAL* WORLD. THEY CAN'T BE *SEEN, HEARD, SMELLED, TOUCHED* OR *TASTED*. THEY'RE MERELY *IDEAS*. AND *EVERYTHING ELSE*--AT THE START--BELONGS TO THE *SENSUAL WORLD*, THE WORLD *OUTSIDE* OF US.
GRADUALLY WE REACH *BEYOND* OURSELVES.
WE ENCOUNTER THE *SIGHT, SMELL, TOUCH, TASTE* AND *SOUND* OF OUR OWN BODIES.
AND OF THE WORLD *AROUND* US.
AND SOON WE DISCOVER THAT OBJECTS OF THE *PHYSICAL WORLD* CAN *ALSO* CROSS OVER--
--AND POSSESS IDENTITIES OF THEIR OWN.
OR, AS OUR *EXTENSIONS*--
--BEGIN TO GLOW--
--WITH THE LIFE--

--WE *LEND* TO THEM.

BY DE-EMPHASIZING THE *APPEARANCE* OF THE *PHYSICAL* WORLD IN FAVOR OF THE *IDEA* OF FORM, THE CARTOON PLACES ITSELF IN THE WORLD OF *CONCEPTS*.

THROUGH TRADITIONAL *REALISM*, THE COMICS ARTIST CAN PORTRAY THE WORLD *WITHOUT*--

--AND THROUGH THE *CARTOON*, THE WORLD *WITHIN*.

WHEN CARTOONS ARE USED *THROUGHOUT* A STORY, THE *WORLD* OF THAT STORY MAY SEEM TO *PULSE WITH LIFE*.

INANIMATE OBJECTS MAY SEEM TO POSSESS *SEPARATE IDENTITIES* SO THAT IF ONE *JUMPED UP* AND STARTED *SINGING* IT WOULDN'T FEEL OUT OF PLACE.

BUT IN EMPHASIZING THE *CONCEPTS* OF OBJECTS OVER THEIR *PHYSICAL APPEARANCE*, MUCH HAS TO BE *OMITTED*.

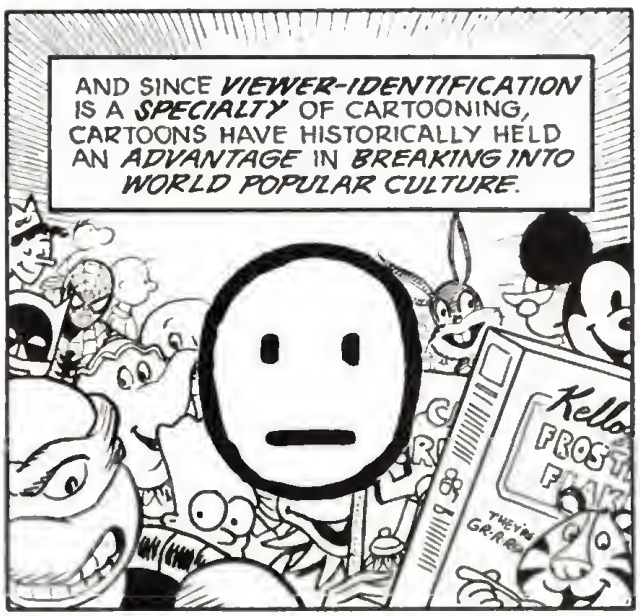
IF AN ARTIST WANTS TO PORTRAY THE BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE *PHYSICAL WORLD*--

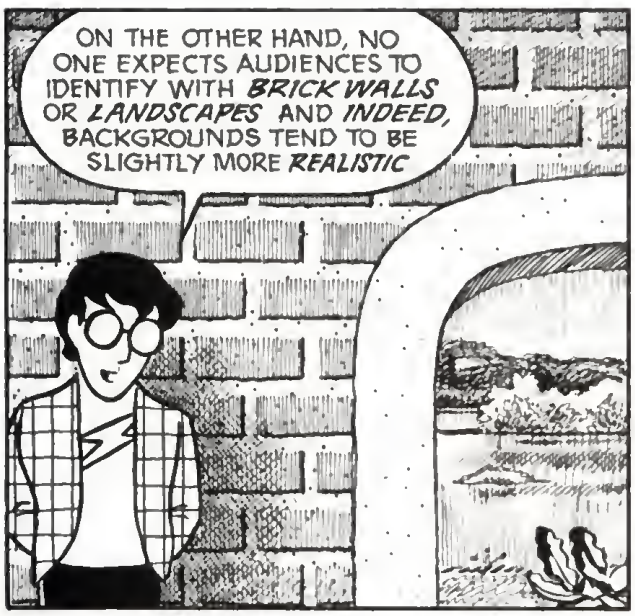
--REALISM OF *SOME* SORT IS GOING TO PLAY A PART.













TINTIN © EDITIONS CASTERMAN.

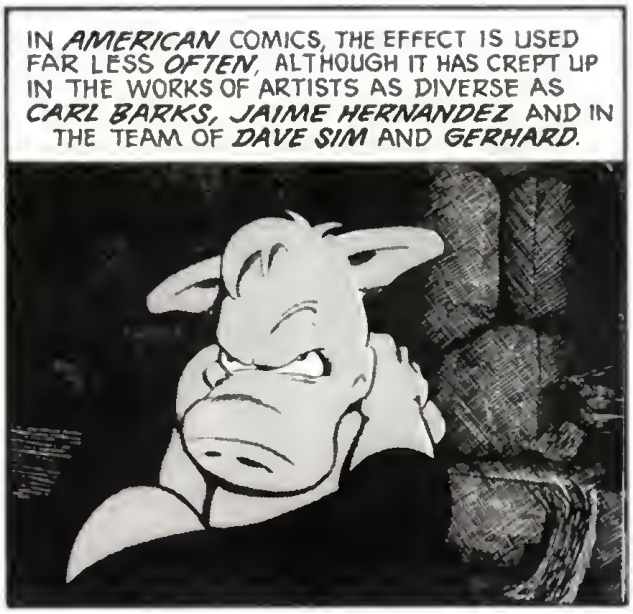
THIS COMBINATION ALLOWS READERS TO *MASK* THEMSELVES IN A CHARACTER AND SAFELY ENTER A SENSUALLY STIMULATING WORLD.











CEREBUS © DAVE SIM.







ART © HAYASI AND OSIMA.

THE RESULTANT HYBRID STYLES HAD TREMENDOUS ICONIC *RANGE*, FROM EXTREMELY CARTOONY CHARACTERS TO *NEAR-PHOTOGRAPHIC BACKGROUNDS*.

"MONA GOES TOKYO"

BUT JAPANESE COMICS ARTISTS TOOK THE IDEA A STEP FURTHER.

SOON, SOME OF THEM REALIZED THAT THE *OBJECTIFYING POWER* OF REALISTIC ARTS COULD BE PUT TO *OTHER* USES.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE *MOST* CHARACTERS WERE DESIGNED *SIMPLY*, TO ASSIST IN *READER-IDENTIFICATION*--

--*OTHER* CHARACTERS WERE DRAWN MORE *REALISTICALLY* IN ORDER TO *OBJECTIFY* THEM, EMPHASIZING THEIR *"OTHERNESS"* FROM THE READER.

A PROP LIKE THIS *SWORD* MIGHT BE VERY *CARTOONY* IN *ONE* SEQUENCE--

--DUE TO THE *"LIFE"* IT POSSESSES AS AN EXTENSION OF MY CARTOON IDENTITY!

ART © HAYASI AND OSIMA

BUT SUPPOSE I NOTICE SOME *MYSTERIOUS WRITING* CARVED ON THE SWORD'S *HILT*.

IN JAPANESE COMICS, THE SWORD MIGHT *NOW* BECOME VERY *REALISTIC*, NOT ONLY TO SHOW US THE DETAILS, BUT TO MAKE US AWARE OF THE SWORD AS AN *OBJECT*, SOMETHING WITH *WEIGHT*, *TEXTURE* AND *PHYSICAL COMPLEXITY*.

IN THIS AND IN *OTHER WAYS*, COMICS IN JAPAN HAVE EVOLVED VERY *DIFFERENTLY* FROM THOSE IN THE WEST.

WE'LL RETURN TO THESE DIFFERENCES SEVERAL TIMES DURING THIS BOOK.

SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION.

I *LIKE* THE MASKING EFFECT, PERSONALLY, BUT IT'S JUST ONE OF *MANY* POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO COMICS ART.

MANY OF MY *FAVORITE ARTISTS* USE IT VERY *RARELY*.

STILL, I HOPE THE JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE ON CARTOONING HELPS DEMONSTRATE THAT ONE'S CHOICE OF STYLES CAN HAVE CONSEQUENCES FAR BEYOND THE MERE *"LOOK"* OF A STORY.

AS I WRITE THIS, IN 1992, AMERICAN AUDIENCES ARE JUST BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT A SIMPLE ***STYLE*** DOESN'T NECESSITATE SIMPLE ***STORY***.



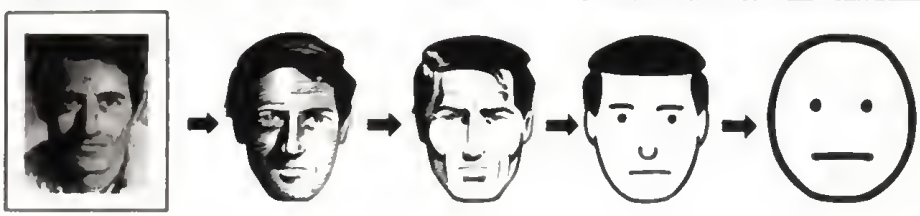
MAUS © AND T.M. ART SPIEGELMAN.

THE PLATONIC IDEAL OF THE CARTOON MAY SEEM TO OMIT MUCH OF THE *AMBIGUITY* AND *COMPLEX CHARACTERIZATION* WHICH ARE THE HALLMARKS OF *MODERN LITERATURE*, LEAVING THEM SUITABLE ONLY FOR *CHILDREN*.

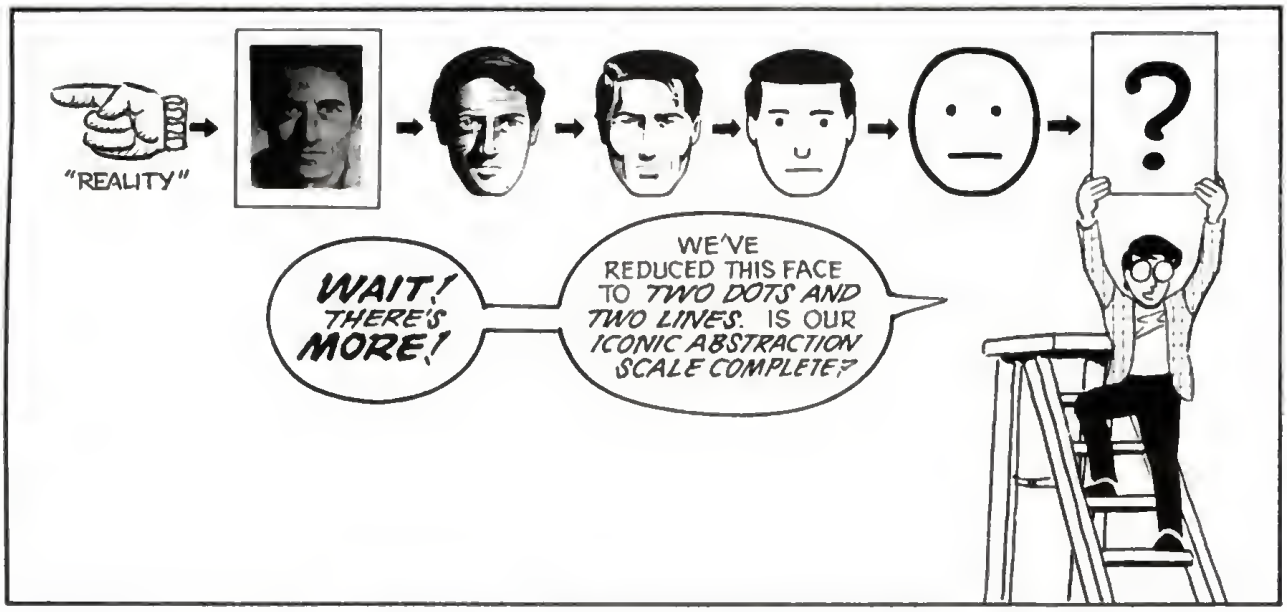
BUT SIMPLE ELEMENTS CAN COMBINE IN COMPLEX WAYS. AS ATOMS BECOME MOLECULES AND MOLECULES BECOME LIFE.

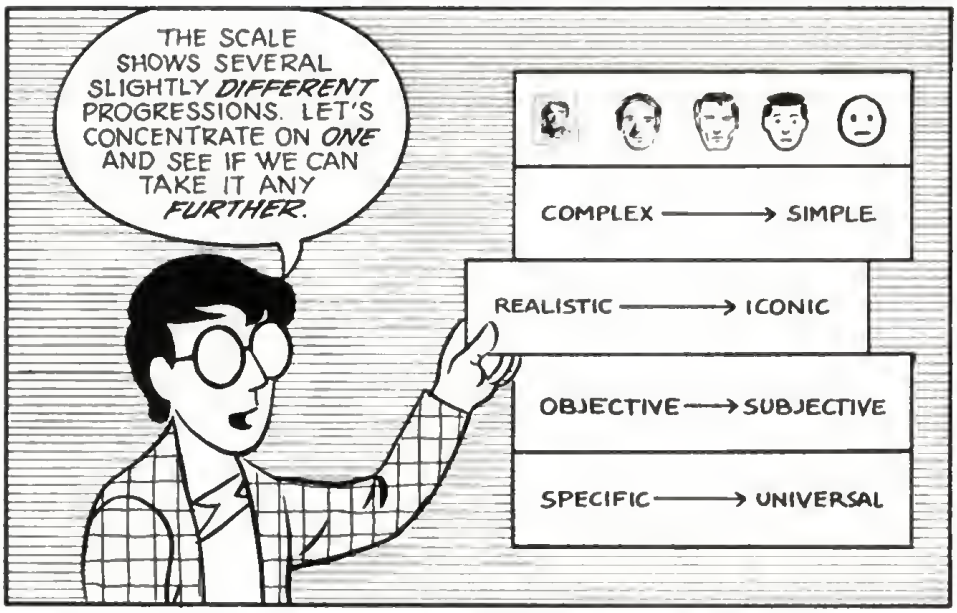
AND *LIKE* THE ATOM, GREAT POWER IS LOCKED IN THESE FEW SIMPLE LINES.

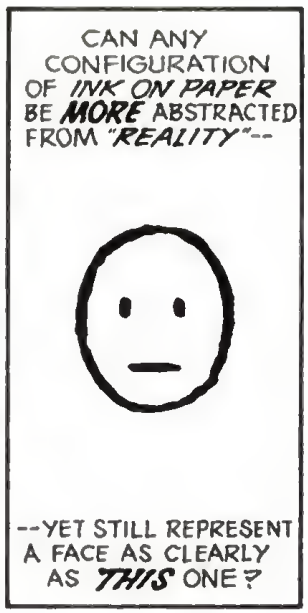
RELEASEABLE ONLY BY THE READER'S MIND.

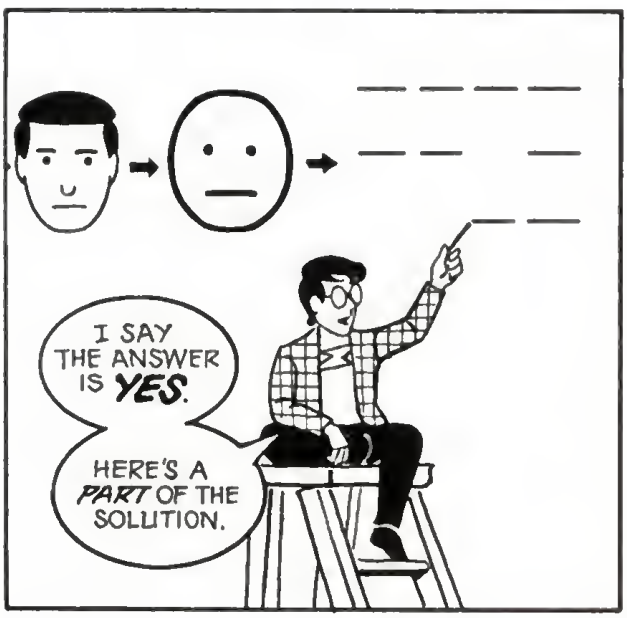


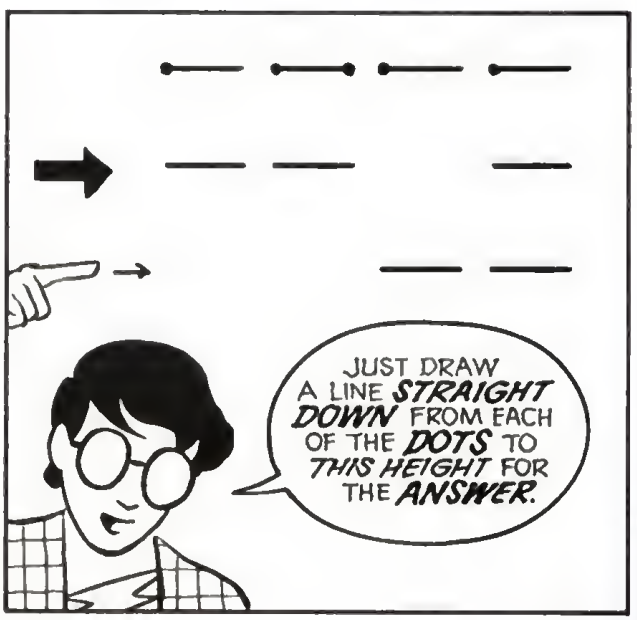
THERE'S A LOT MORE TO *CARTOONS* THAN MEETS THE EYE!


"REALITY"
?
WAIT! THERE'S MORE!
WE'VE REDUCED THIS FACE TO TWO DOTS AND TWO LINES. IS OUR ICONIC ABSTRACTION SCALE COMPLETE?


THE SCALE SHOWS SEVERAL SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT PROGRESSIONS. LET'S CONCENTRATE ON ONE AND SEE IF WE CAN TAKE IT ANY FURTHER.
COMPLEX → SIMPLE
REALISTIC → ICONIC
OBJECTIVE → SUBJECTIVE
SPECIFIC → UNIVERSAL


CAN ANY CONFIGURATION OF INK ON PAPER BE MORE ABSTRACTED FROM "REALITY"--
--YET STILL REPRESENT A FACE AS CLEARLY AS THIS ONE?


I SAY THE ANSWER IS YES.
HERE'S A PART OF THE SOLUTION.


JUST DRAW A LINE STRAIGHT DOWN FROM EACH OF THE DOTS TO THIS HEIGHT FOR THE ANSWER.


MEANING RETAINED.
RESEMBLANCE GONE.
--ARE THE ULTIMATE ABSTRACTION.
MOST AMERICAN COMICS, NOTABLY COMIC BOOKS, HAVE LONG EMPHASIZED THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WORDS AND PICTURES.
WRITING AND DRAWING ARE SEEN AS SEPARATE DISCIPLINES, WRITERS AND ARTISTS AS SEPARATE BREEDS--
-- AND "GOOD" COMICS AS THOSE IN WHICH THE COMBINATION OF THESE VERY DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION IS THOUGHT TO BE HARMONIOUS.
BUT JUST HOW "DIFFERENT" ARE THEY ?
WORDS, PICTURES AND OTHER ICONS ARE THE VOCABULARY OF THE LANGUAGE CALLED COMICS.
A SINGLE UNIFIED LANGUAGE DESERVES A SINGLE, UNIFIED VOCABULARY.
WITHOUT IT, COMICS WILL CONTINUE TO LIMP ALONG AS THE "BASTARD CHILD" OF WORDS AND PICTURES.
SEVERAL FACTORS HAVE CONSPIRED AGAINST COMICS RECEIVING THE UNIFIED IDENTITY IT NEEDS.
AND AMONG THEM LIE SOME OF OUR VERY BEST INSTINCTS.

BOTH ARTIST AND WRITER BEGIN, HANDS JOINED ACROSS THE GAP, WITH A COMMON PURPOSE: TO MAKE COMICS OF "*QUALITY*"

"ARTIE"

"RITA"

FACE

THE ARTIST KNOWS THAT THIS MEANS MORE THAN JUST *STICK-FIGURES* AND *CRUDE CARTOONS*. HE SETS OFF IN SEARCH OF A *HIGHER* ART.

THE WRITER KNOWS THAT THIS MEANS MORE THAN JUST *OOF!* *POW!* *BLAM!* AND *ONE-A-DAY GAGS*. SHE SETS OFF IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING *DEEPER*.

IN MUSEUMS AND IN LIBRARIES, THE ARTIST FINDS WHAT HE'S LOOKING FOR. HE STUDIES THE TECHNIQUES OF THE *GREAT MASTERS* OF *WESTERN ART*. HE PRACTICES *NIGHT AND DAY*.

SHE *TOO* FINDS WHAT SHE'S LOOKING FOR, IN THE GREAT MASTERS OF *WESTERN LITERATURE*. SHE READS AND WRITES *CONSTANTLY*. SHE SEARCHES FOR A VOICE *UNIQUELY HERS*.

FINALLY, THEY'RE READY. BOTH HAVE *MASTERED THEIR ARTS*. HIS BRUSHSTROKE IS NEARLY *INVISIBLE* IN ITS SUBTLETY, THE FIGURES PURE *MICHAELANGELO*. HER DESCRIPTIONS ARE *DAZZLING*. THE WORDS FLOW TOGETHER LIKE A *SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET*.

THEY'RE READY TO *JOIN HANDS* ONCE MORE AND CREATE A *COMICS MASTERPIECE*.

?

?

FACE

TWO EYES, ONE NOSE, ONE MOUTH.

Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now...

PICTURES ARE ***RECEIVED*** INFORMATION. WE NEED NO FORMAL EDUCATION TO *"GET THE MESSAGE."* THE MESSAGE IS *INSTANTANEOUS.*

WRITING IS ***PERCEIVED*** INFORMATION. IT TAKES TIME AND SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE TO DECODE THE ABSTRACT SYMBOLS OF LANGUAGE.

FACE → TWO EYES, ONE NOSE, ONE MOUTH. → *Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now...*

RECEIVED . . . . . PERCEIVED

WHEN PICTURES ARE MORE ABSTRACTED FROM "REALITY," THEY REQUIRE GREATER LEVELS OF *PERCEPTION,* ***MORE LIKE WORDS.***

WHEN WORDS ARE BOLDER, MORE DIRECT, THEY REQUIRE *LOWER* LEVELS OF PERCEPTION AND ARE RECEIVED *FASTER,* ***MORE LIKE PICTURES.***

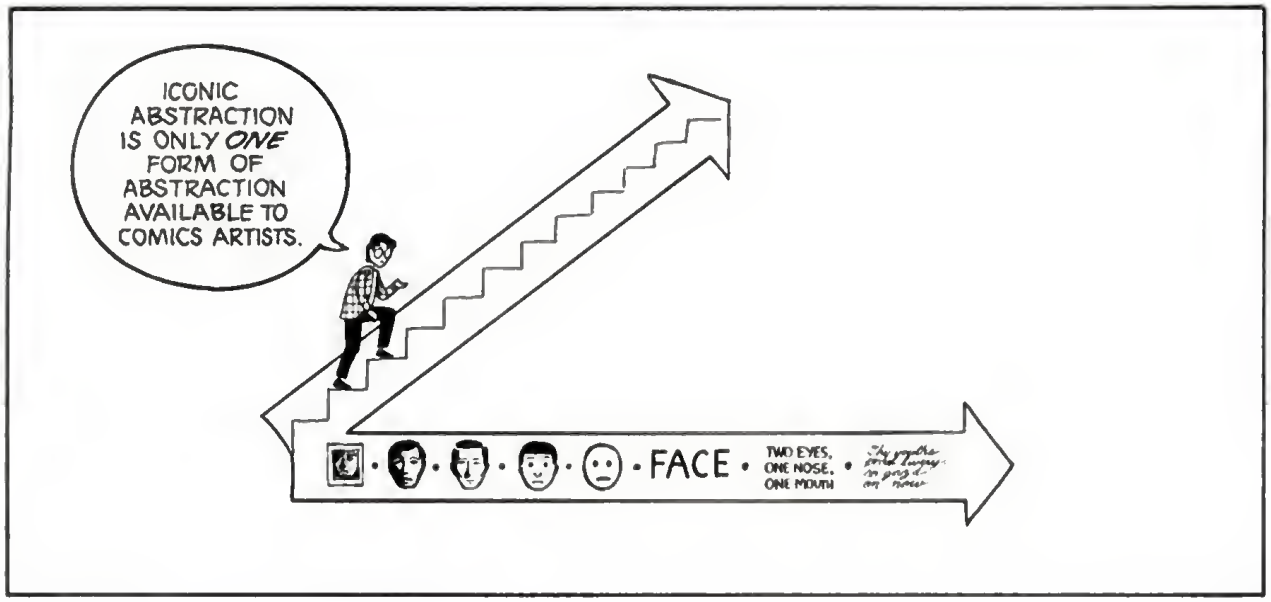
OUR NEED FOR A UNIFIED ***LANGUAGE*** OF COMICS SENDS US TOWARD THE CENTER WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES ARE LIKE TWO SIDES OF *ONE COIN!*

BUT OUR NEED FOR ***SOPHISTICATION*** IN COMICS SEEMS TO LEAD US *OUTWARD,* WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES ARE MOST *SEPARATE.*

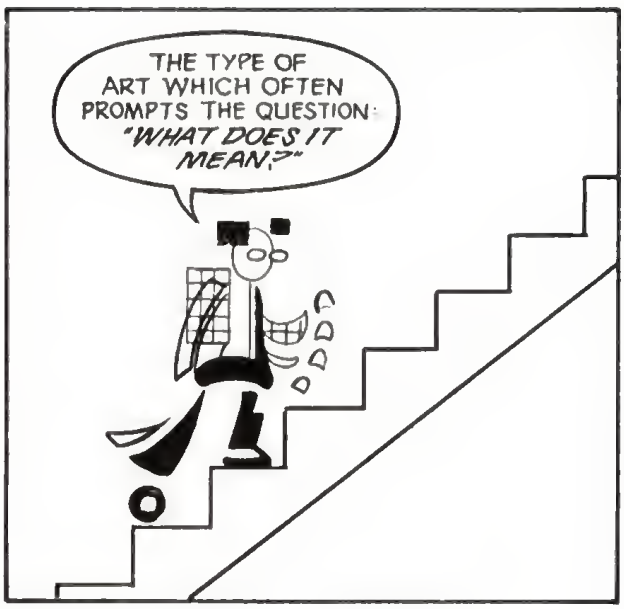
BOTH ARE ***WORTHY ASPIRATIONS.*** BOTH STEM FROM A LOVE OF COMICS AND A DEVOTION TO ITS FUTURE.

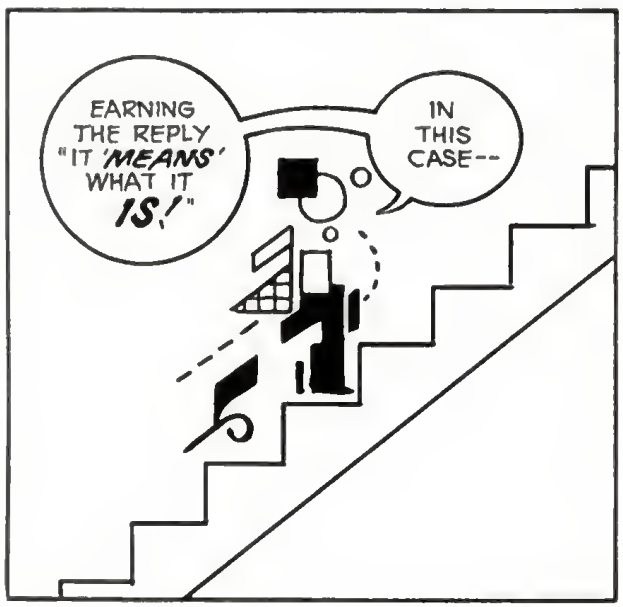
CAN THEY BE *RECONCILED?*

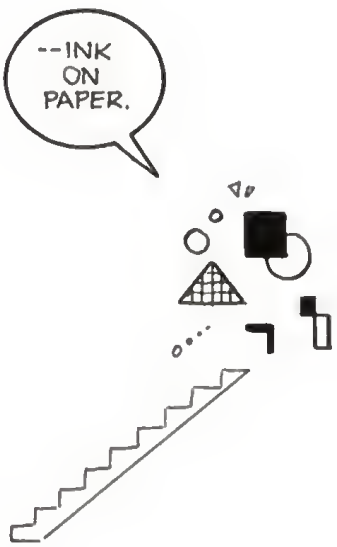
I SAY THE ANSWER IS *YES,* BUT SINCE THE REASONS BELONG IN A *DIFFERENT CHAPTER,* WE'LL HAVE TO COME BACK TO THIS *LATER.*

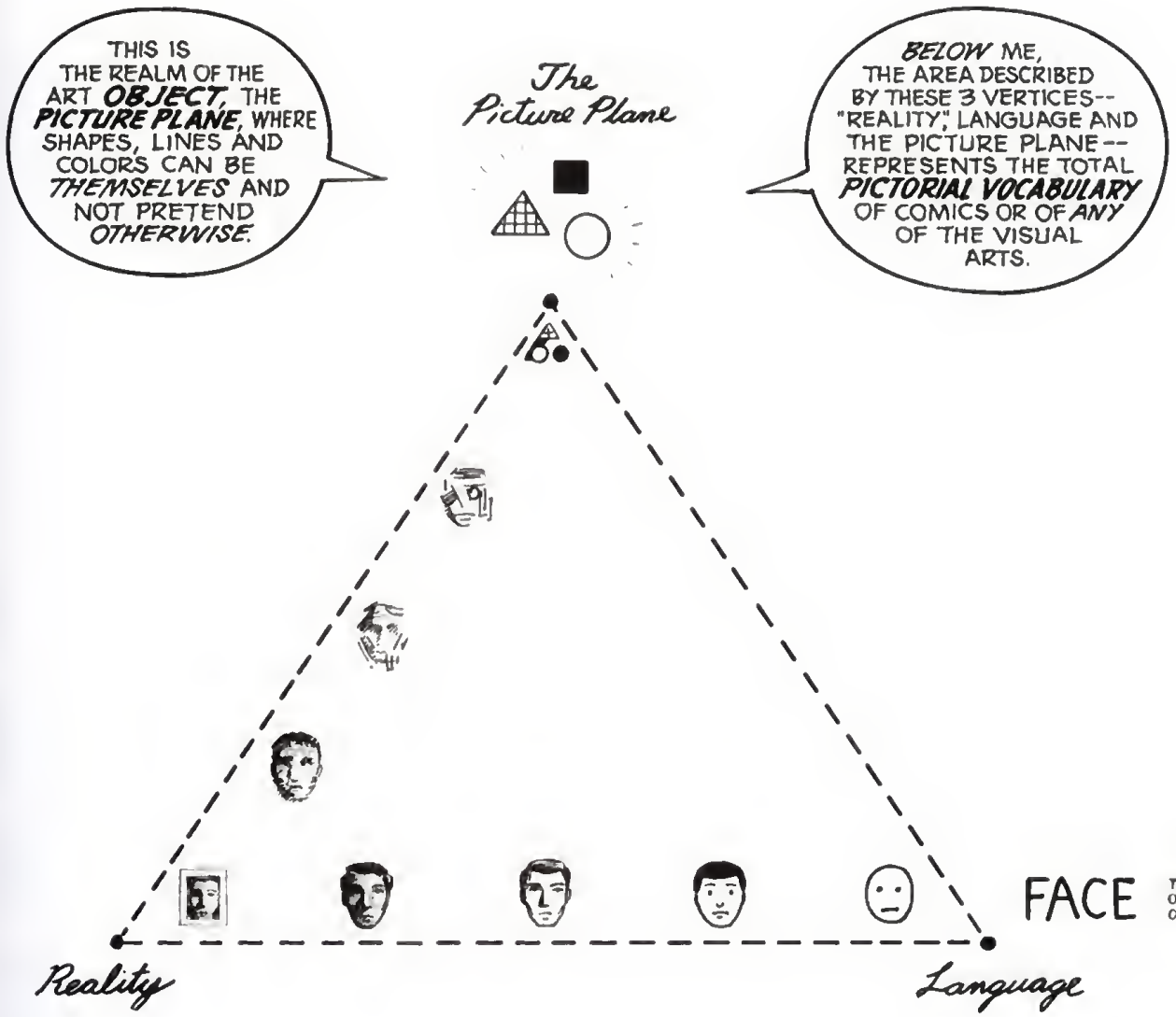

ICONIC ABSTRACTION IS ONLY ONE FORM OF ABSTRACTION AVAILABLE TO COMICS ARTISTS.
FACE
TWO EYES, ONE NOSE, ONE MOUTH

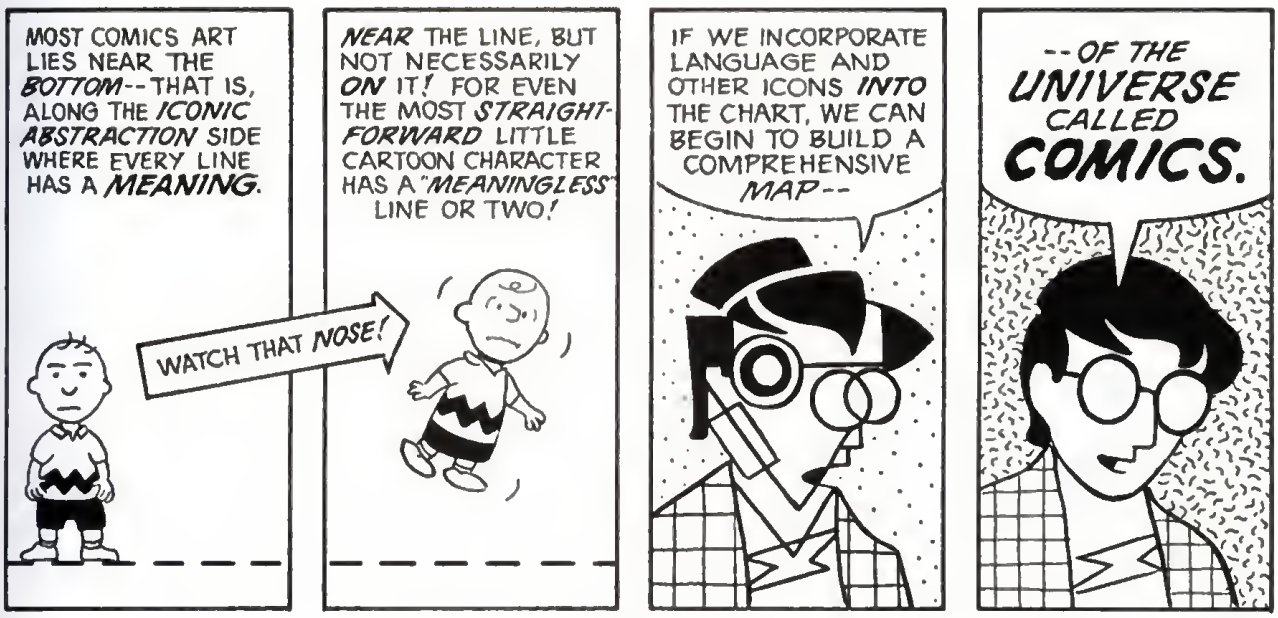

USUALLY THE WORD "ABSTRACTION" REFERS TO THE NON-ICONIC VARIETY, WHERE NO ATTEMPT IS MADE TO CLING TO RESEMBLANCE OR MEANING.

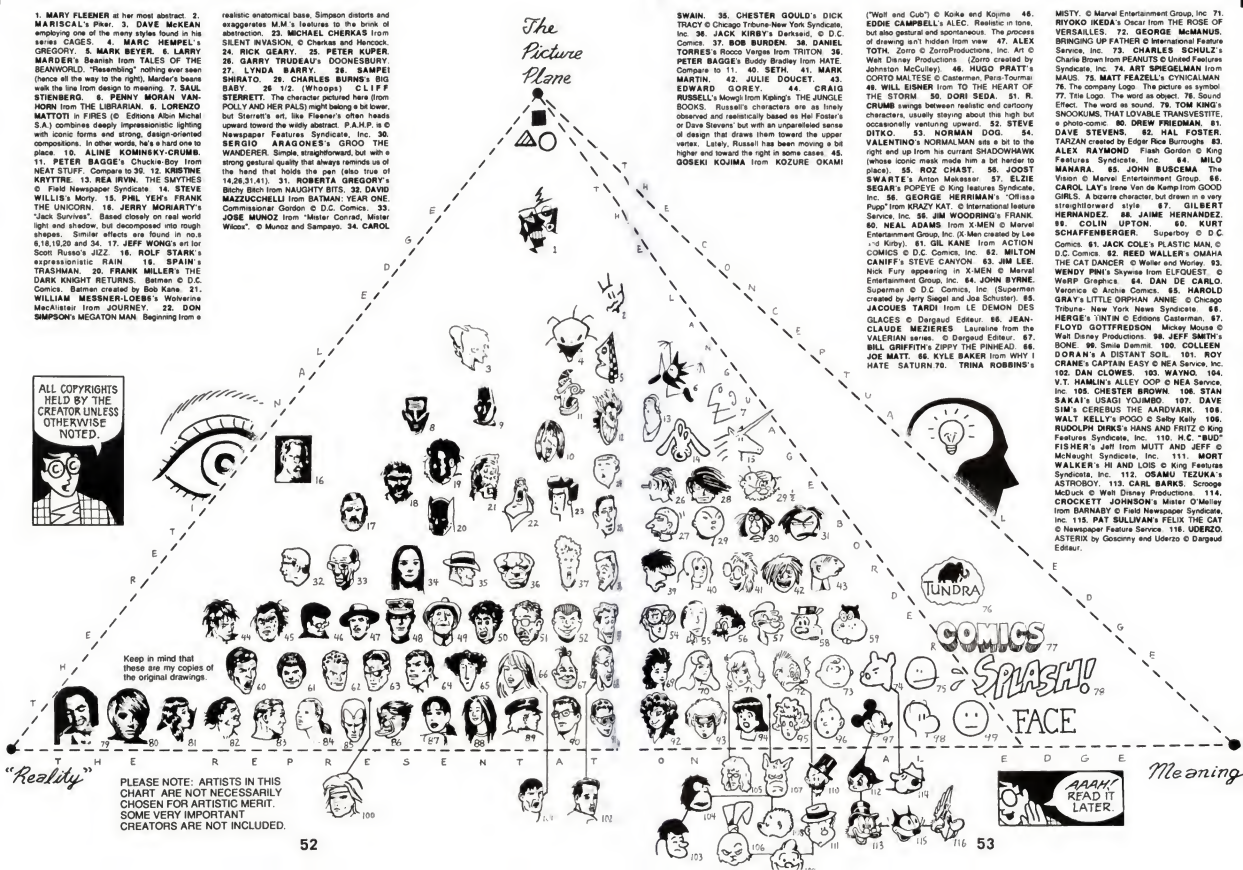

THE TYPE OF ART WHICH OFTEN PROMPTS THE QUESTION: "WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"


EARNING THE REPLY "IT 'MEANS' WHAT IT IS!"
IN THIS CASE--


--INK ON PAPER.


THIS IS THE REALM OF THE ART OBJECT, THE PICTURE PLANE, WHERE SHAPES, LINES AND COLORS CAN BE THEMSELVES AND NOT PRETEND OTHERWISE.
The Picture Plane
BELOW ME, THE AREA DESCRIBED BY THESE 3 VERTICES-- "REALITY," LANGUAGE AND THE PICTURE PLANE-- REPRESENTS THE TOTAL PICTORIAL VOCABULARY OF COMICS OR OF ANY OF THE VISUAL ARTS.
FACE
TWO EYES, ONE NOSE, ONE MOUTH
Reality
Language


MOST COMICS ART LIES NEAR THE BOTTOM--THAT IS, ALONG THE ICONIC ABSTRACTION SIDE WHERE EVERY LINE HAS A MEANING.
WATCH THAT NOSE!
NEAR THE LINE, BUT NOT NECESSARILY ON IT! FOR EVEN THE MOST STRAIGHT-FORWARD LITTLE CARTOON CHARACTER HAS A "MEANINGLESS" LINE OR TWO!
IF WE INCORPORATE LANGUAGE AND OTHER ICONS INTO THE CHART, WE CAN BEGIN TO BUILD A COMPREHENSIVE MAP--
--OF THE UNIVERSE CALLED COMICS.



1. MARY FLEENER at her most abstract. **2.** MARISCAL Peter. **3.** DAVE McKEAN employing one of the many styles found in his series CAGES. **4.** MARC HEMPEL's GREGORY. **5.** MARK BEYER. **6.** LARRY MARDER's Beanish from TALES OF THE BEANWORLD. "Resembling" nothing ever seen (hence all the way to the right). Marder's beans walk the line from design to meaning. **7.** SAUL STEINBERG. **8.** PENNY MORAN VAN-HORN from THE LIBRARIAN. **9.** LORENZO MATTOTI in FIRES (© Editions Albin Michal S.A.) combines deeply impressionistic lighting with iconic forms and strong, design-oriented compositions. In other words, he's a hard one to place. **10.** ALINE KOMINSKY-CRUMB. **11.** PETER BAGGE's Chuckle-Boy from NEAT STUFF. Compare to 39. **12.** KRISTINE KRYTTINE. **13.** REA IRVIN. THE SMYTHES © Field Newspaper Syndicate. **14.** STEVE WILLIS's Monty. **15.** PHIL YEH's FRANK THE UNICORN. **16.** JERRY MORIARTY's "Jack Survives". Based closely on real world light and shadow, but decomposed into rough shapes. Similar effects are found in nos. 6,18,19,20 and 34. **17.** JEFF WONG's art lor Scott Russo's JIZZ. **18.** ROLF STARK's expressionistic RAIN. **19.** SPAIN's TRASHMAN. **20.** FRANK MILLER's THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS. Batmen © D.C. Comics. Batman created by Bob Kane. **21.** WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS's Wolverine MacAllistair from JOURNEY. **22.** DON SIMPSON's MEGATON MAN. Beginning from a realistic anatomical base, Simpson distorts and exaggerates M.M.'s features to the brink of abstraction. **23.** MICHAEL CHERKAS from SILENT INVASION, © Cherkas and Hancock. **24.** RICK GEARY. **25.** PETER KUPER. **26.** GARRY TRUDEAU's DOONESBURY. **27.** LYNDA BARRY. **28.** SAMPEI SHIRATO. **29.** CHARLES BURNS's BIG BABY. **29 1/2.** (Whoops) CLIFF STERRETT. The character pictured here (from POLLY AND HER PALS) might belong a bit lower, but Sterrett's art, like Fleener's often heads upward toward the wildly abstract. P.A.H.P. is © Newspaper Features Syndicate, Inc. **30.** SERGIO ARAGONES's GROO THE WANDERER. Simple, straightforward, but with a strong gestural quality that always reminds us of the hand that holds the pen (also true of 14,26,31,41). **31.** ROBERTA GREGORY's Bitchy Bitch from NAUGHTY BITS. **32.** DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI from BATMAN: YEAR ONE. Commissonar Gordon © D.C. Comics. **33.** JOSE MUNOZ from "Mister Conrad, Mister Wilcox". © Munoz and Sampayo. **34.** CAROL SWAIN. **35.** CHESTER GOULD's DICK TRACY © Chicago Tribune-New York Syndicate, Inc. **36.** JACK KIRBY's Darkseid, © D.C. Comics. **37.** BOB BURDEN. **38.** DANIEL TORRES's Rocco Vargas from TRITON. **39.** PETER BAGGE's Buddy Bradley from HATE. Compare to 11. **40.** SETH. **41.** MARK MARTIN. **42.** JULIE DOUCET. **43.** EDWARD GOREY. **44.** CRAIG RUSSELL's Mowgli from Kipling's THE JUNGLE BOOKS. Russell's characters are as finely observed and realistically based as Hal Foster's or Dave Stevens' but with an unparalleled sense of design that draws them toward the upper vertex. Lately, Russell has been moving a bit higher and toward the right in some cases. **45.** GOSEKI KOJIMA from KOZURE OKAMI ("Wolf and Cub") © Koike and Kojima. **46.** EDDIE CAMPBELL's ALEC. Realistic in tone, but also gestural and spontaneous. The process of drawing isn't hidden from view. **47.** ALEX TOTH. Zorro © ZorroProductions, Inc. Art © Wait Disney Productions (Zorro created by Johnston McCulley). **48.** HUGO PRATT's CORTO MALTESE © Castermen, Paris-Tournai. **49.** WILL EISNER from TO THE HEART OF THE STORM. **50.** GORI SEDA. **51.** R. CRUMB swings between realistic and cartoony characters, usually staying about this high but occasionally venturing upward. **52.** STEVE DITKO. **53.** NORMAN DOG. **54.** VALENTINO's NORMAL MAN sits a bit to the right and up from his currant SHADOWHAWK (whose iconic mask mode him a bit herder to place). **55.** ROZ CHAST. **55.** JOOST SWARTE's Anton Makassar. **57.** ELZIE SEGAR's POPEYE © King features Syndicate, Inc. **58.** GEORGE HERRIMAN's "Offisa Pupp" from KRAZY KAT. © International feature Service, Inc. **59.** JIM WOODRING's FRANK. **60.** NEAL ADAMS from X-MEN © Merval Entertainment Group, Inc. (X-Men created by Lee and Kirby). **61.** GIL KANE from ACTION COMICS © D.C. Comics, Inc. **62.** MILTON CANIFF's STEVE CANYON. **63.** JIM LEE. Nick Fury appearing in X-MEN © Merval Entertainment Group, Inc. **64.** JOHN BYRNE. Superman © D.C. Comics, Inc. (Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joa Schuster). **65.** JACQUES TARDI from LE DEMON DES GLACES © Dargaud Editeur. **66.** JEAN-CLAUDE MEZIERES. Laureline from the VALERIAN series. © Dargeud Editeur. **67.** BILL GRIFFITH's ZAP THE PINHEAD. **68.** JOE MATT. **66.** KYLE BAKER from WHY I HATE SATURN.**70.** TRINA ROBBINS's MISTY. © Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc **71.** RIYOKO IKEDA's Oscar from THE ROSE OF VERSAILLES. **72.** GEORGE McMANUS, BRINGING UP FATHER © International Feature Service, Inc. **73.** CHARLES SCHULZ's Charlie Brown from PEANUTS © United Features Syndicate, Inc. **74.** ART SPIEGELMAN's MAUS. **75.** MATT FEAZELL's CYNICALMAN **76.** The company Logo. The picture as symbol. **77.** Title Logo. The word as object. **78.** Sound Effect. The word as sound. **79.** TOM KING's SNOOKUMS. THAT LOVABLE TRANSVESTITE, a photo-comic. **80.** DREW FRIEDMAN. **81.** DAVE STEVENS. **82.** HAL FOSTER. TARZAN created by Edger Rice Burroughs. **83.** ALEX RAYMOND Flash Gordon © King Features Syndicate, Inc. **84.** MILO MANARA. **85.** JOHN BUSCEMA The Mason © Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. **86.** CAROL LAY's Irene Van de Kemp from GOOD GIRLS. A bizarre character, but drawn in a very straightforward style. **87.** GILBERT HERNANDEZ. **88.** JAIME HERNANDEZ. **89.** COLIN UPTON. **90.** KURT SCHAFFENBERGER. Superboy © D.C Comics. **91.** JACK COLE's PLASTIC MAN, © D.C. Comics. **92.** REED WALLER's OMAHA THE CAT DANCER © Waller and Worley. **93.** WENDY PINI's Skywise from ELFQUEST. © WaRP Graphics. **94.** DAN DE CARLO. Veronica © Archie Comics. **95.** HAROLD GRAY's LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE © Chicago Tribune- New York News Syndicate. **96.** HERGE's TINTIN © Editions Casterman. **97.** FLOYD GOTTFREDSON Mickey Mouse © Walt Disney Productions. **98.** JEFF SMITH's BONE. **99.** Smile Dammit. **100.** COLLEEN DORAN's A DISTANT SOIL. **101.** ROY CRANE's CAPTAIN EASY © NEA Service, Inc. **102.** DAN CLOWES. **103.** WAYNO. **104.** V.T. HAMLIN's ALLEY OOP © NEA Service, Inc. **105.** CHESTER BROWN. **106.** STAN SAKAI's USAGI YOJIMBO. **107.** DAVE SIM's CEREBUS THE AARDVARK. **108.** WALT KELLY's POGO © Selby Kelly. **109.** RUDOLPH DIRKS's HANS AND FRITZ © King Features Syndicate, Inc. **110.** H.C. "BUD" FISHER's Jeff from MUTT AND JEFF © McNaught Syndicate, Inc. **111.** MORT WALKER's HI AND LOIS © King Features Syndicate, Inc. **112.** OSAMU TEZUKA's ASTROBOY. **113.** CARL BARKS. Scrooge McDuck © Walt Disney Productions. **114.** CROCKETT JOHNSON's Master O'Malley from BARNABY © Field Newspaper Syndicate, Inc. **115.** PAT SULLIVAN's FELIX THE CAT © Newspaper Feature Service. **116.** UDERZO. ASTERIX by Goscinny and Uderzo © Dargaud Editeur.

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CYNICALMAN © MATT FEAZELL

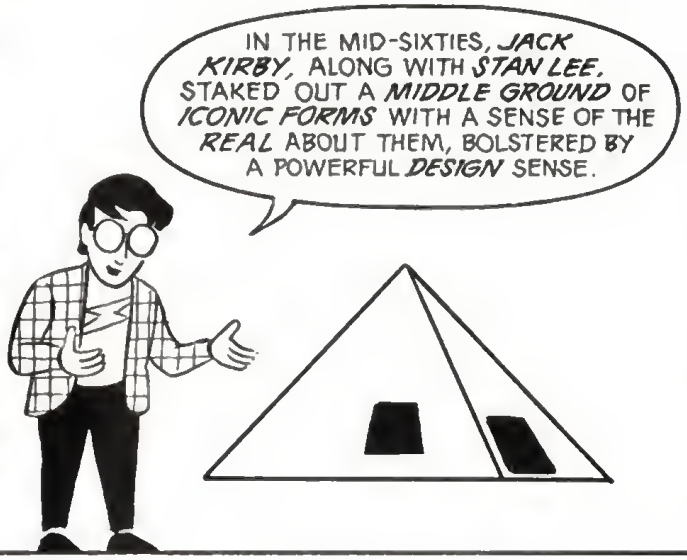
ART © EDITIONS CASTERMAN.



ART © MARY FLEENER.



ART: JACK KIRBY AND JOE SINNOTT (MY FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: STAN LEE.



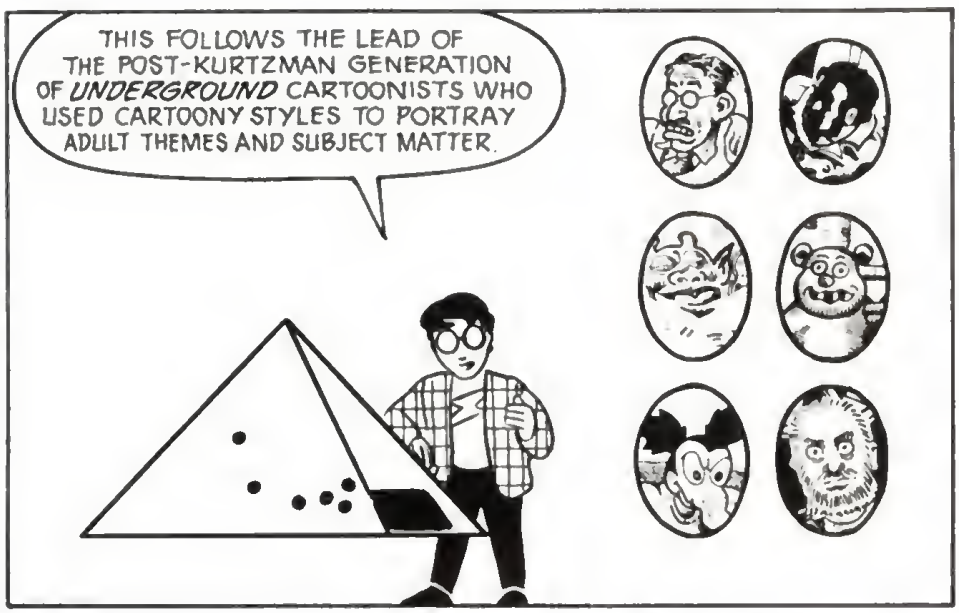




ART: JIM LEE AND SCOTT WILLIAMS (FACSIMILE)
SCRIPT: CHRIS CLAREMONT.

ART FROM COLOR PANELS TRACED FOR REPRODUCTION.
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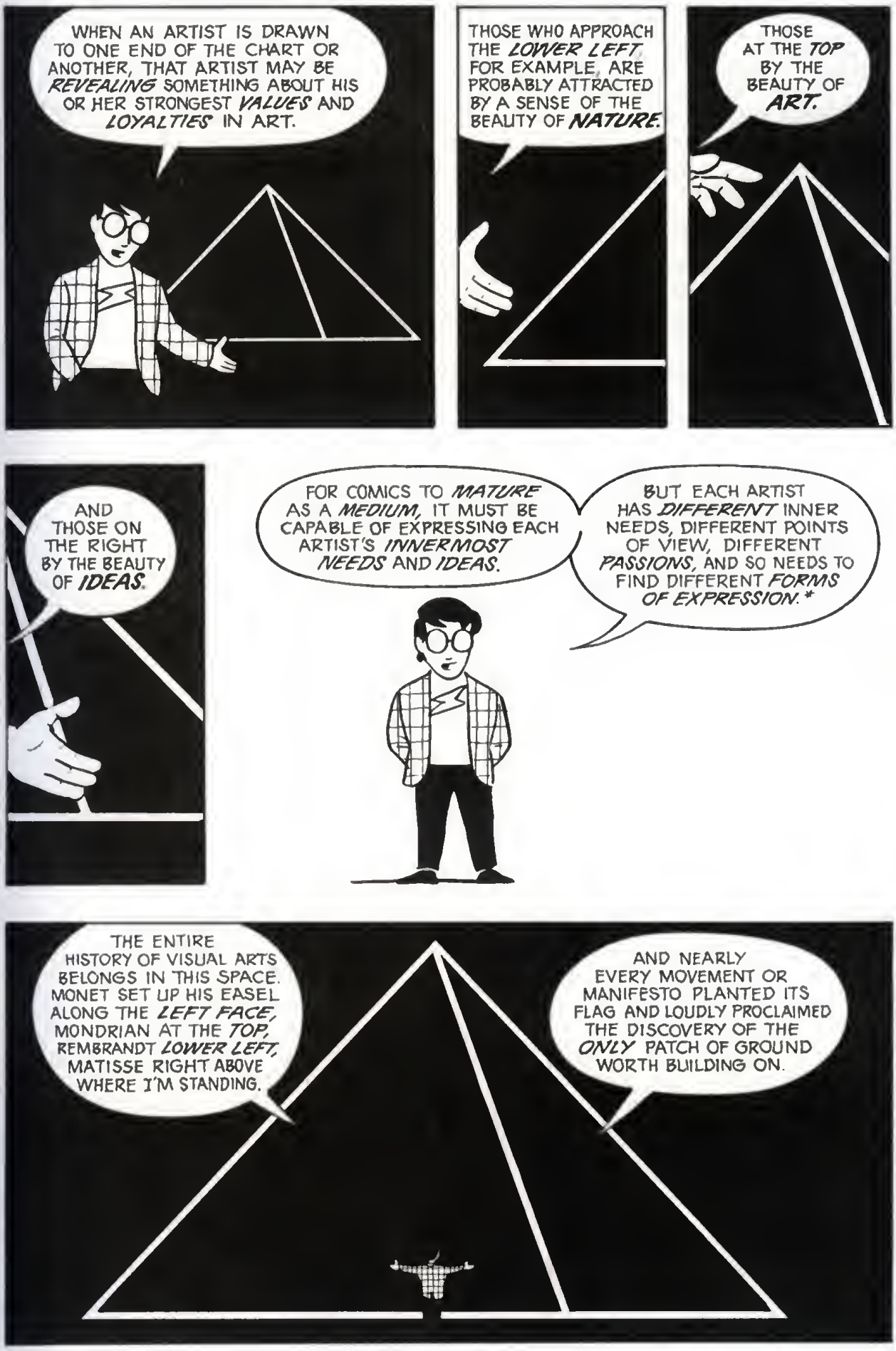
SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION



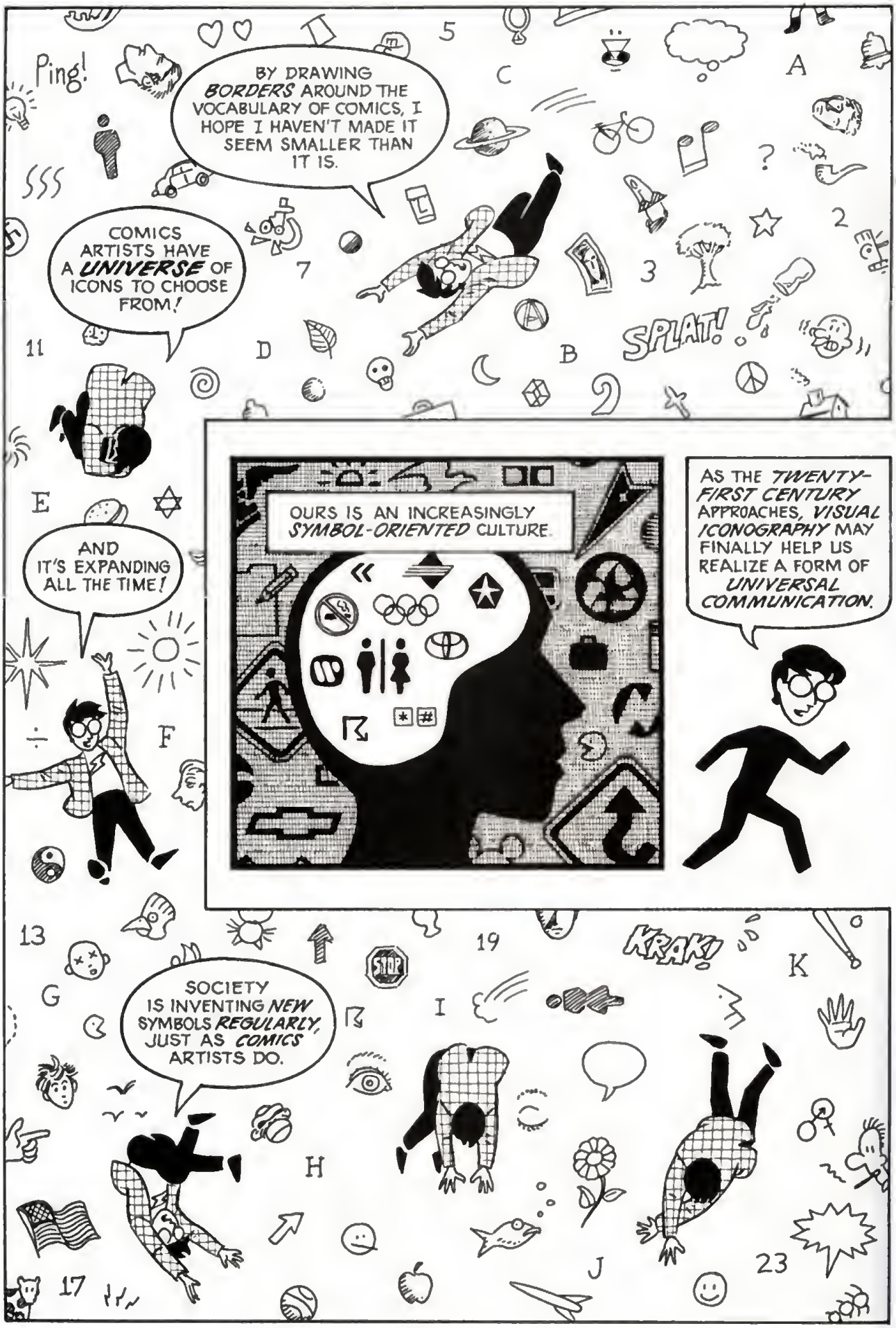


SERGIO AND GROO © SERGIO ARAGONES.

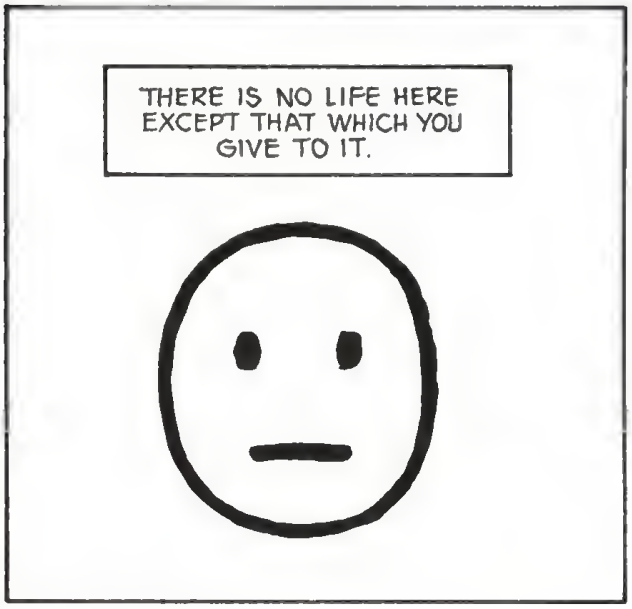
ART (LEFT) © DAVE McKEAN, (RIGHT) © D.C. COMICS.



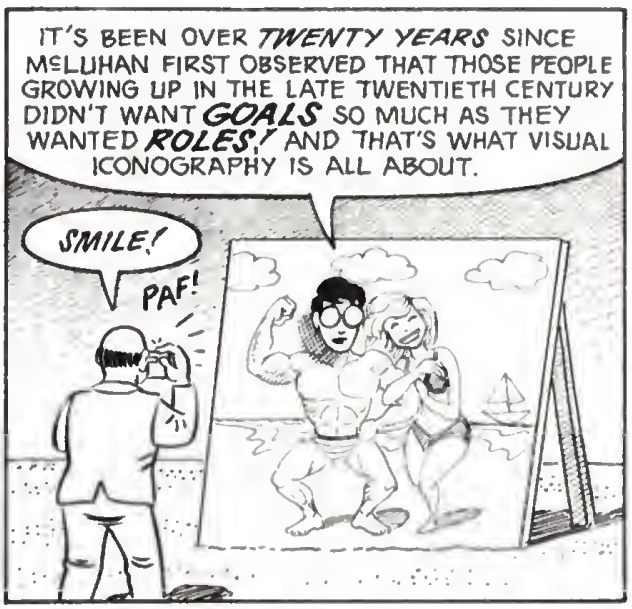
* CHECK OUT WASSILY KANDINSKY'S TERRIFIC 1912 ESSAY, "ON THE PROBLEM OF FORM."

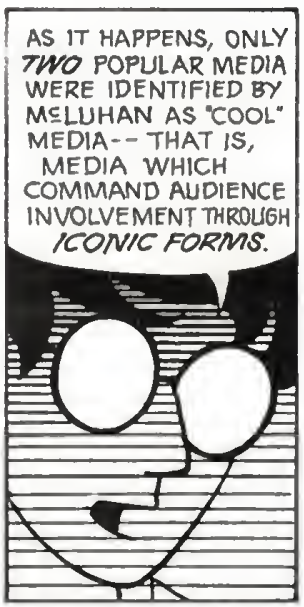

Ping!
BY DRAWING BORDERS AROUND THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS, I HOPE I HAVEN'T MADE IT SEEM SMALLER THAN IT IS.
COMICS ARTISTS HAVE A UNIVERSE OF ICONS TO CHOOSE FROM!
SPLAT!
OURS IS AN INCREASINGLY SYMBOL-ORIENTED CULTURE.
AND IT'S EXPANDING ALL THE TIME!
AS THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY APPROACHES, VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY MAY FINALLY HELP US REALIZE A FORM OF UNIVERSAL COMMUNICATION.
SOCIETY IS INVENTING NEW SYMBOLS REGULARLY, JUST AS COMICS ARTISTS DO.
KRAK!
STOP


ICONS DEMAND OUR PARTICIPATION TO MAKE THEM WORK.


THERE IS NO LIFE HERE EXCEPT THAT WHICH YOU GIVE TO IT.


IT'S *YOUR* JOB TO CREATE AND *RECREATE* ME MOMENT BY MOMENT, NOT JUST THE CARTOONIST'S.


IT'S BEEN OVER *TWENTY YEARS* SINCE McLUHAN FIRST OBSERVED THAT THOSE PEOPLE GROWING UP IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY DIDN'T WANT *GOALS* SO MUCH AS THEY WANTED *ROLES!* AND THAT'S WHAT VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS ALL ABOUT.
SMILE!
PAF!


AS IT HAPPENS, ONLY *TWO* POPULAR MEDIA WERE IDENTIFIED BY McLUHAN AS "COOL" MEDIA-- THAT IS, MEDIA WHICH COMMAND AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT THROUGH *ICONIC FORMS.*


ONE OF THEM, *TELEVISION,* HAS REACHED INTO THE LIVES OF EVERY HUMAN BEING ON EARTH--


--AND FOR BETTER OR WORSE, ALTERED THE COURSE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS FROM HERE 'TIL *DOOMSDAY.*

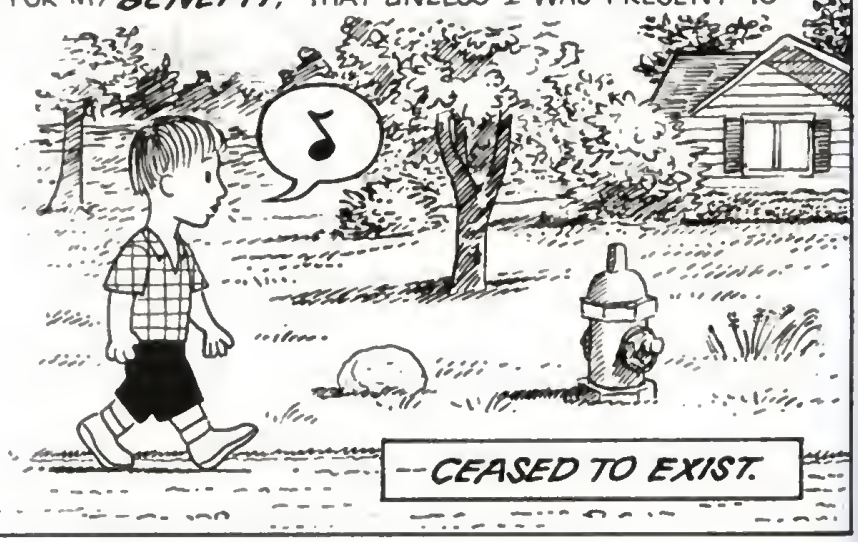

THE FATE OF THE *OTHER* ONE, *COMICS*--
SEQUENTIAL ART


-- IS ANYONE'S GUESS.

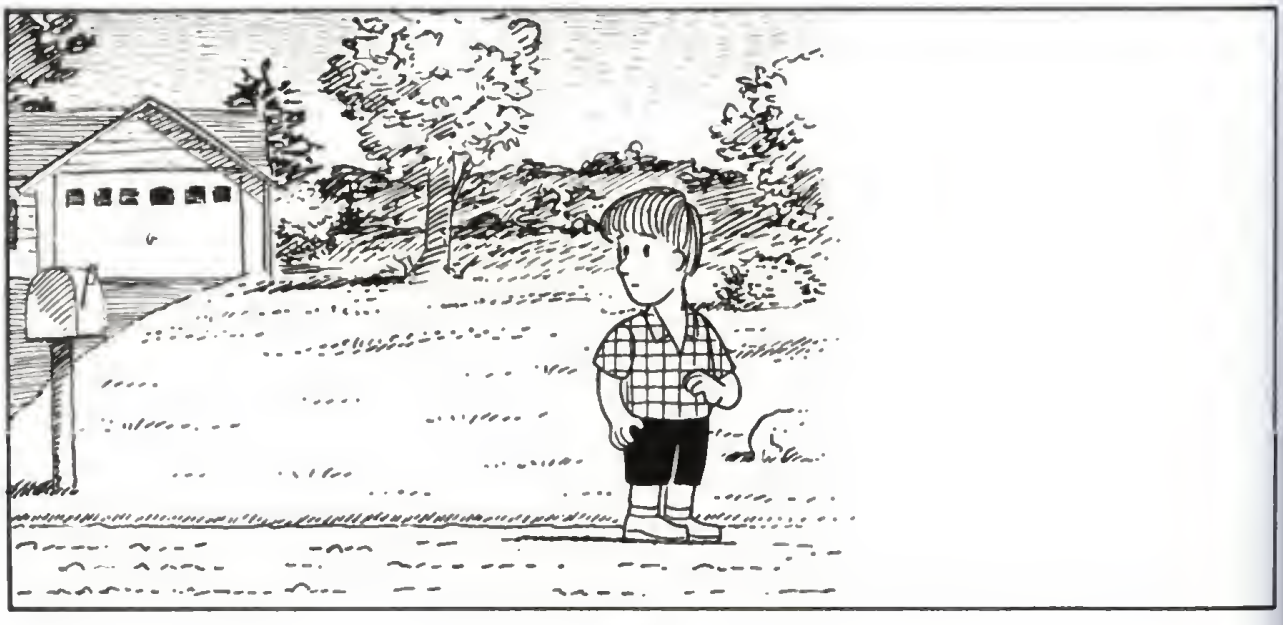
CHAPTER THREE

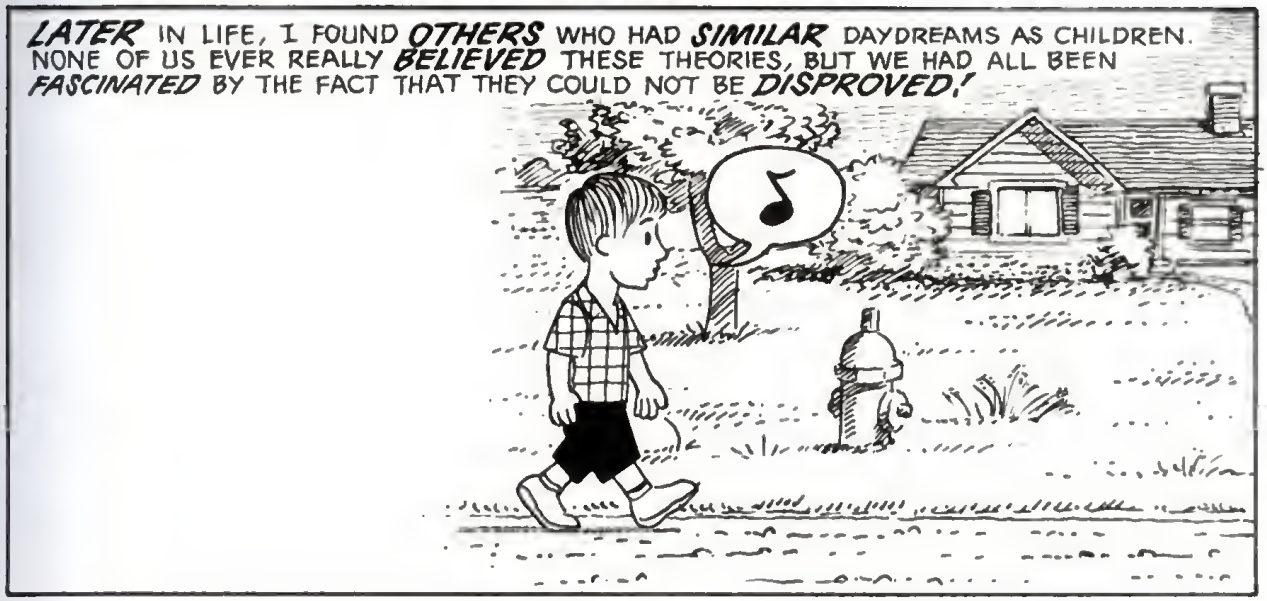
BLOOD IN THE GUTTER.

WHEN I WAS VERY YOUNG, I HAD A RECURRENT *DAYDREAM* THAT THE ***WHOLE WORLD*** WAS JUST A ***SHOW*** PUT ON FOR MY ***BENEFIT***, THAT UNLESS I WAS PRESENT TO ***SEE*** THINGS, THEY JUST--



--CEASED TO EXIST.



















* NOT TO SAY OUR SENSES ARE ANY KIND OF GUARANTEE!

ALL OF US PERCEIVE THE WORLD AS A *WHOLE* THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR *SENSES*.

YET OUR SENSES CAN ONLY REVEAL A WORLD THAT IS *FRAGMENTED* AND *INCOMPLETE*.



EVEN THE MOST *WIDELY TRAVELLED* MIND CAN ONLY SEE SO MUCH OF THE WORLD IN THE COURSE OF A LIFE.

OUR PERCEPTION OF "REALITY" IS AN ACT OF *FAITH*, BASED ON MERE *FRAGMENTS*.



AS *INFANTS*, WE'RE *UNABLE* TO COMMIT THAT ACT OF FAITH. IF WE CAN'T *SEE* IT, *HEAR* IT, *SMELL* IT, *TASTE* IT OR *TOUCH* IT, IT ISN'T *THERE!*

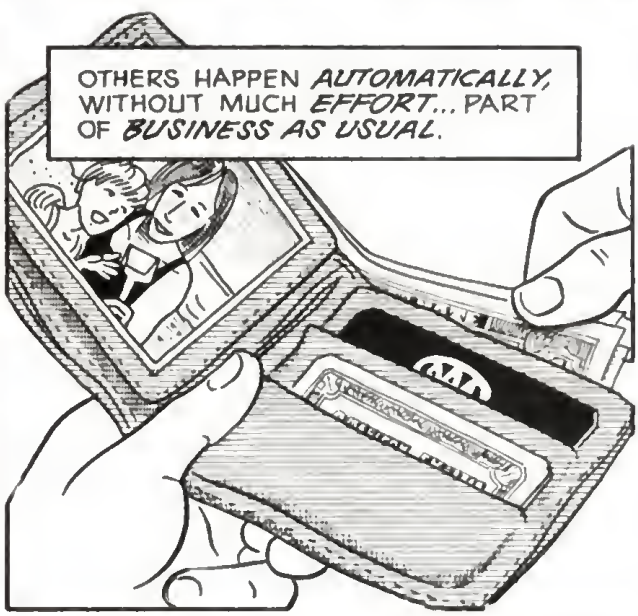
THE GAME "*PEEK-A-BOO*" PLAYS ON THIS IDEA. GRADUALLY, WE ALL LEARN THAT EVEN THOUGH THE *SIGHT* OF MOMMY COMES AND GOES, MOMMY *REMAINS*.




THIS PHENOMENON OF *OBSERVING THE PARTS* BUT *PERCEIVING THE WHOLE* HAS A *NAME*.
IT'S CALLED *CLOSURE*.

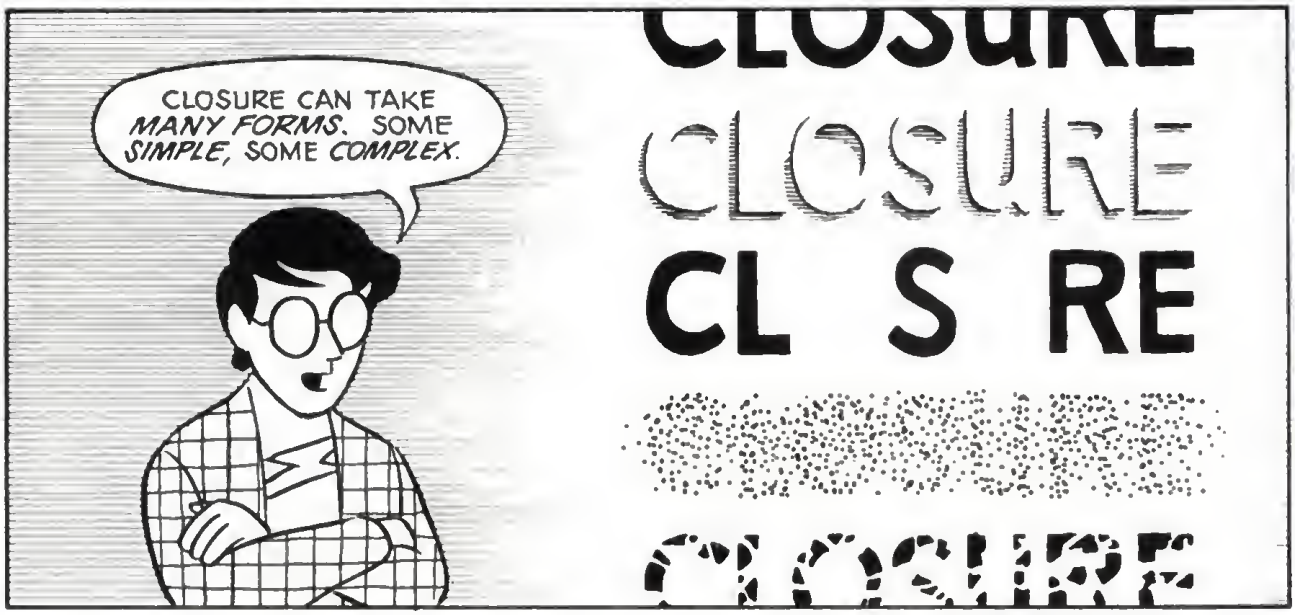

IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE OFTEN COMMIT CLOSURE, MENTALLY COMPLETING THAT WHICH IS *INCOMPLETE* BASED ON *PAST EXPERIENCE*.
SALE
SALE

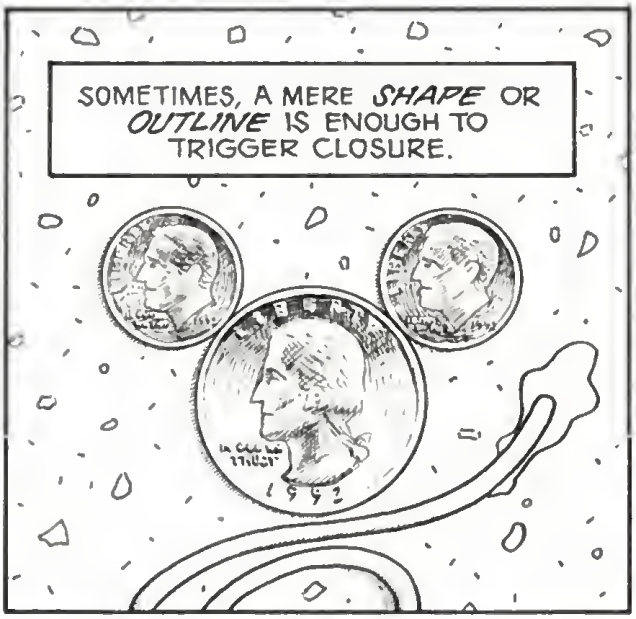

SOME FORMS OF CLOSURE ARE *DELIBERATE INVENTIONS* OF *STORYTELLERS* TO PRODUCE *SUSPENSE* OR TO *CHALLENGE AUDIENCES*.

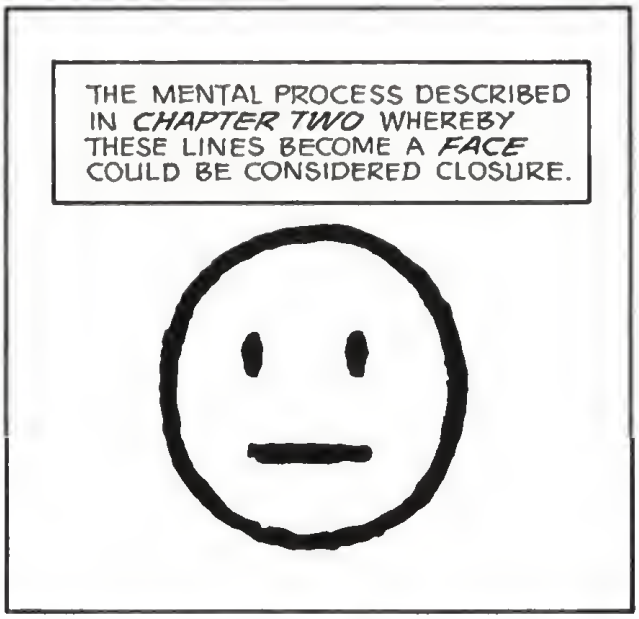

OTHERS HAPPEN *AUTOMATICALLY*, WITHOUT MUCH *EFFORT*... PART OF *BUSINESS AS USUAL*.


IN *RECOGNIZING* AND *RELATING TO OTHER PEOPLE*, WE *ALL* DEPEND *HEAVILY* ON OUR LEARNED ABILITY OF CLOSURE.

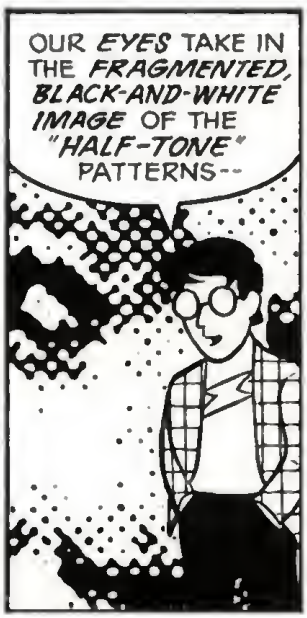

IN AN *INCOMPLETE WORLD*, WE MUST *DEPEND* ON CLOSURE FOR OUR VERY *SURVIVAL*.


CLOSURE CAN TAKE MANY FORMS. SOME SIMPLE, SOME COMPLEX.
CLOSURE
CLOSURE
CL S RE
CLOSURE


SOMETIMES, A MERE SHAPE OR OUTLINE IS ENOUGH TO TRIGGER CLOSURE.
1992

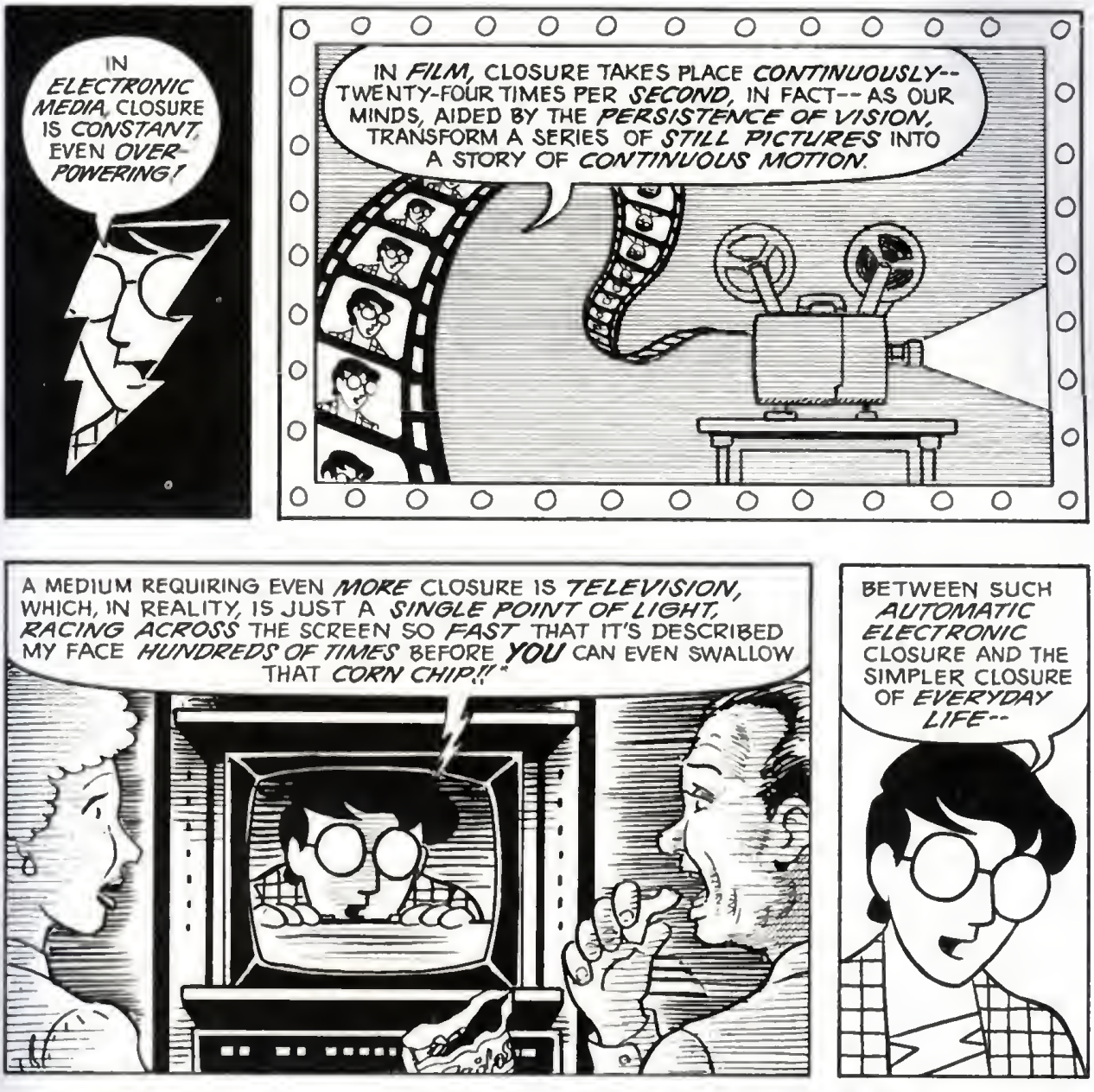

THE MENTAL PROCESS DESCRIBED IN CHAPTER TWO WHEREBY THESE LINES BECOME A FACE COULD BE CONSIDERED CLOSURE.


EVERY TIME WE SEE A PHOTOGRAPH REPRODUCED IN A NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE, WE COMMIT CLOSURE.


OUR EYES TAKE IN THE FRAGMENTED, BLACK-AND-WHITE IMAGE OF THE "HALF-TONE" PATTERNS--


--AND OUR MINDS TRANSFORM IT INTO THE "REALITY"--


--OF THE PHOTOGRAPH!

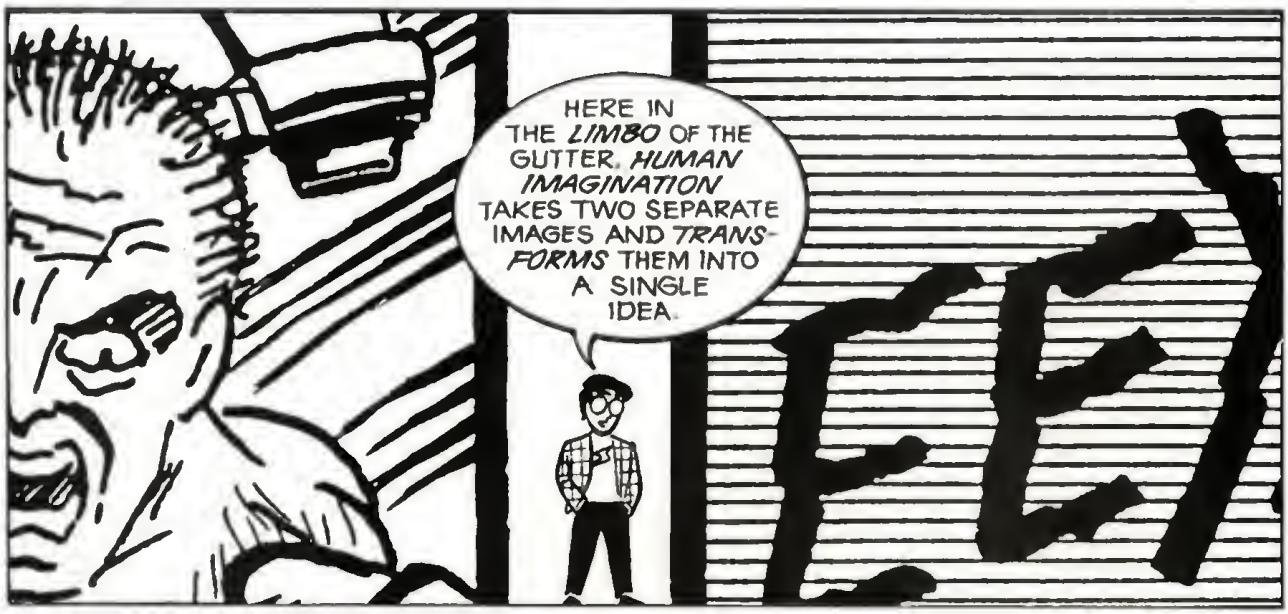


* MEDIA GURU TONY SCHWARTZ DESCRIBES THIS AT LENGTH IN HIS BOOK *MEDIA, THE SECOND GOD*, ANCHOR BOOKS, 1983.

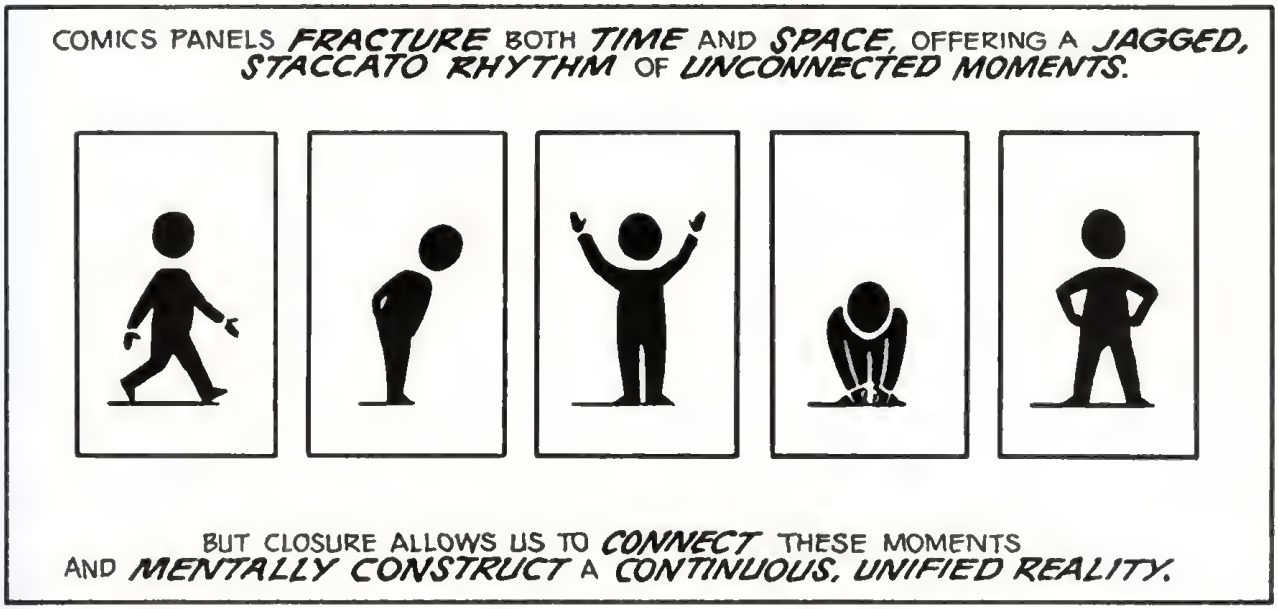

NOW YOU DIE!!
NO! NO!

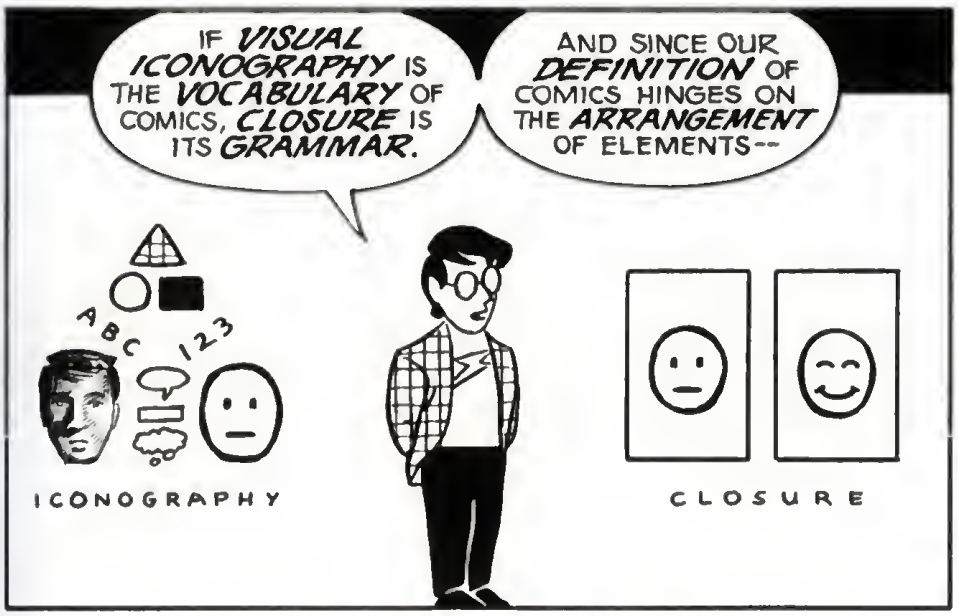

EEYAA!!


SEE THAT SPACE BETWEEN THE PANELS? THAT'S WHAT COMICS AFICIONADOS HAVE NAMED "THE GUTTER."
AND DESPITE ITS UNCEREMONIOUS TITLE, THE GUTTER PLAYS HOST TO MUCH OF THE MAGIC AND MYSTERY THAT ARE AT THE VERY HEART OF COMICS!

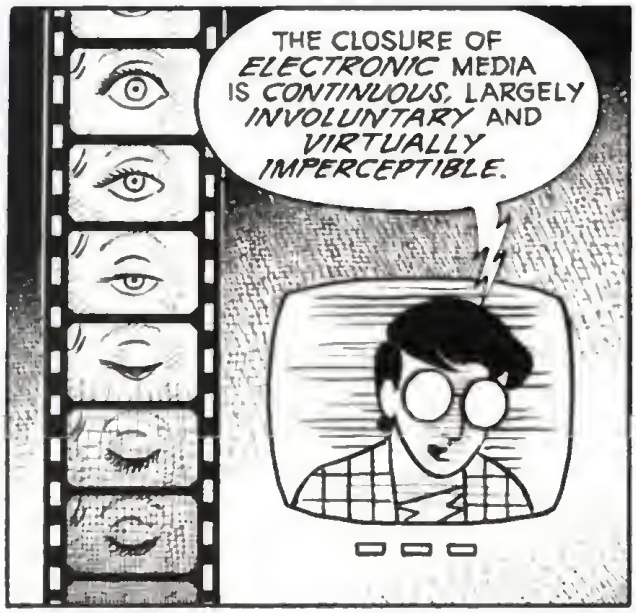

HERE IN THE LIMBO OF THE GUTTER, HUMAN IMAGINATION TAKES TWO SEPARATE IMAGES AND TRANSFORMS THEM INTO A SINGLE IDEA.

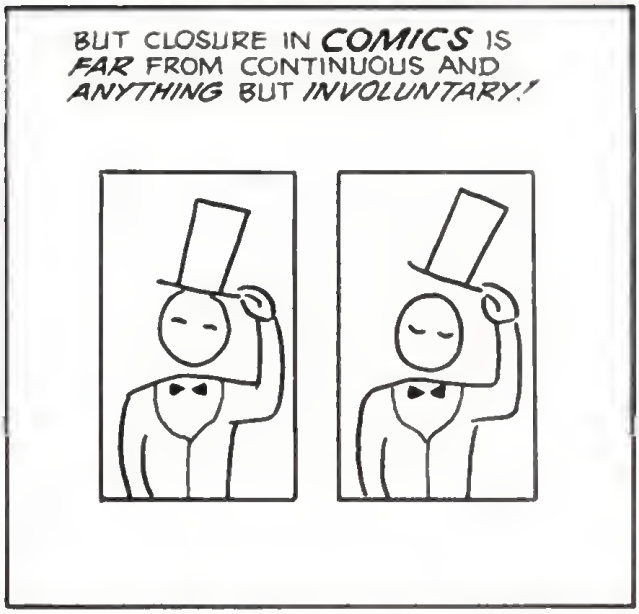

NOTHING IS *SEEN* BETWEEN THE TWO PANELS, BUT *EXPERIENCE* TELLS YOU SOMETHING *MUST* BE THERE!
Peek-A-Boo!
Peek-A-Boo!


COMICS PANELS *FRACTURE* BOTH *TIME* AND *SPACE*, OFFERING A *JAGGED, STACCATO RHYTHM* OF *UNCONNECTED MOMENTS.*
BUT CLOSURE ALLOWS US TO *CONNECT* THESE MOMENTS AND *MENTALLY CONSTRUCT* A *CONTINUOUS, UNIFIED REALITY.*


IF *VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY* IS THE *VOCABULARY* OF COMICS, *CLOSURE* IS ITS *GRAMMAR.*
AND SINCE OUR *DEFINITION* OF COMICS HINGES ON THE *ARRANGEMENT* OF ELEMENTS--
ABC 123
ICONOGRAPHY
CLOSURE


--THEN, IN A VERY REAL SENSE, *COMICS IS CLOSURE!*









I MAY HAVE DRAWN AN AXE BEING RAISED IN THIS EXAMPLE, BUT I'M NOT THE ONE WHO LET IT DROP OR DECIDED HOW HARD THE BLOW, OR WHO SCREAMED, OR WHY.



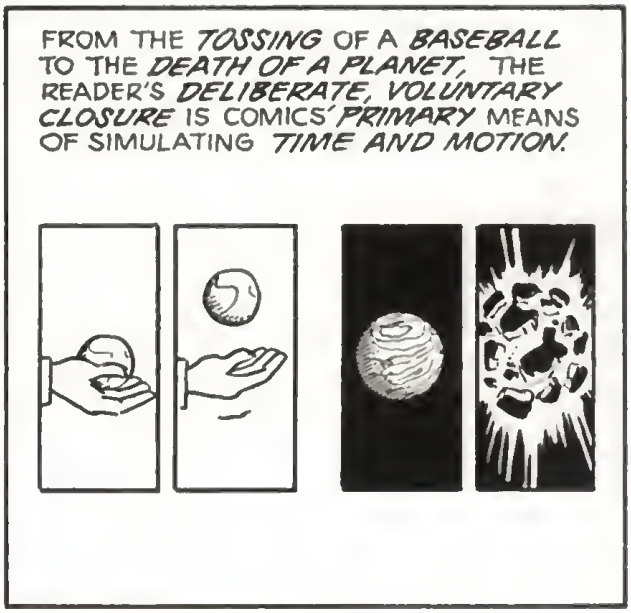
THAT, DEAR READER, WAS YOUR SPECIAL CRIME, EACH OF YOU COMMITTING IT IN YOUR OWN STYLE.

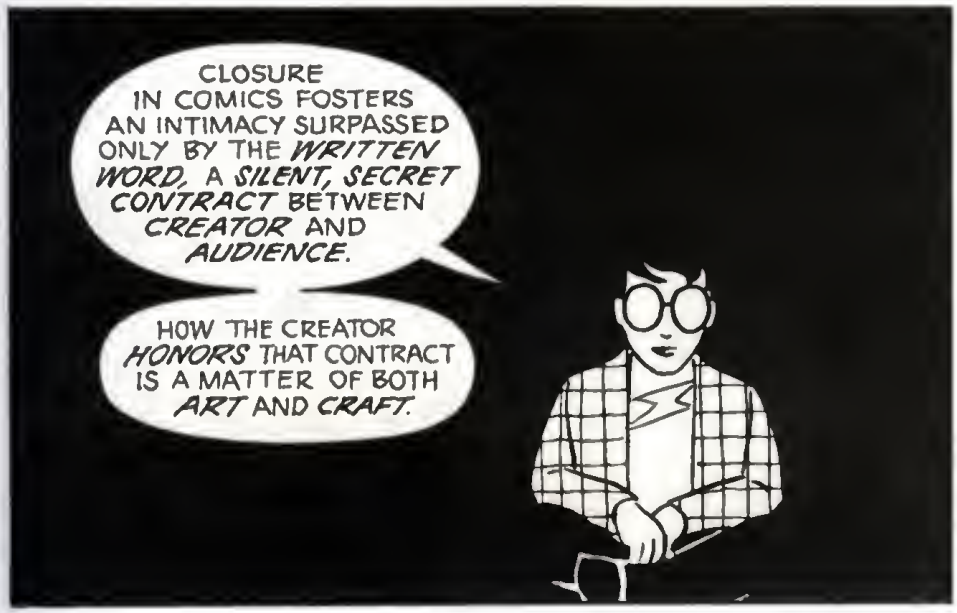



TO KILL A MAN BETWEEN PANELS IS TO CONDEMN HIM TO A THOUSAND DEATHS.


PARTICIPATION IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN ANY MEDIUM. FILMMAKERS LONG AGO REALIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLOWING VIEWERS TO USE THEIR IMAGINATIONS.


BUT WHILE FILM MAKES USE OF AUDIENCES' IMAGINATIONS FOR OCCASIONAL EFFECTS, COMICS MUST USE IT FAR MORE OFTEN!


FROM THE TOSSING OF A BASEBALL TO THE DEATH OF A PLANET, THE READER'S DELIBERATE, VOLUNTARY CLOSURE IS COMICS' PRIMARY MEANS OF SIMULATING TIME AND MOTION.

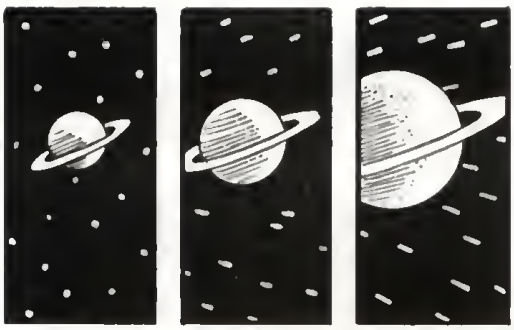

CLOSURE IN COMICS FOSTERS AN INTIMACY SURPASSED ONLY BY THE WRITTEN WORD, A SILENT, SECRET CONTRACT BETWEEN CREATOR AND AUDIENCE.
HOW THE CREATOR HONORS THAT CONTRACT IS A MATTER OF BOTH ART AND CRAFT.

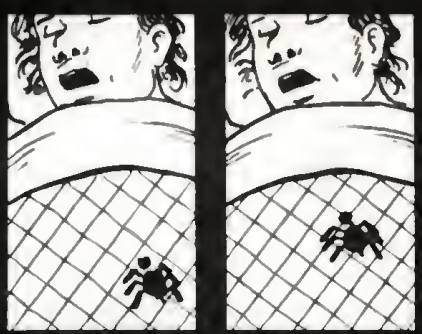

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE CRAFT.

MOST *PANEL-TO-PANEL* TRANSITIONS IN COMICS CAN BE PLACED IN ONE OF SEVERAL DISTINCT *CATEGORIES*. THE *FIRST* CATEGORY -- WHICH WE'LL CALL ***MOMENT-TO MOMENT***--REQUIRES VERY *LITTLE* CLOSURE.

1.

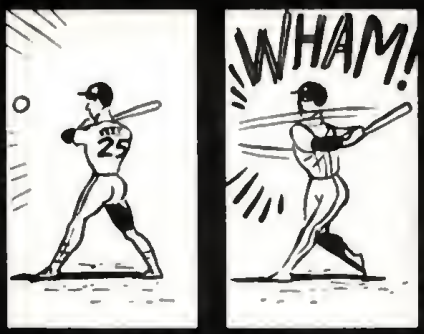




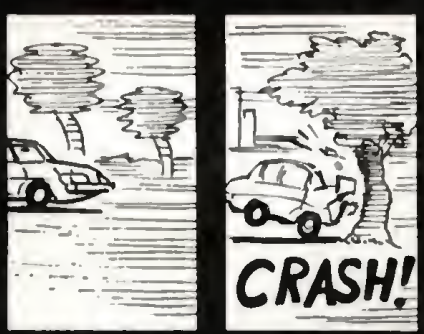


NEXT ARE THOSE TRANSITIONS FEATURING A SINGLE *SUBJECT* IN DISTINCT ***ACTION-TO-ACTION*** PROGRESSIONS.

2.

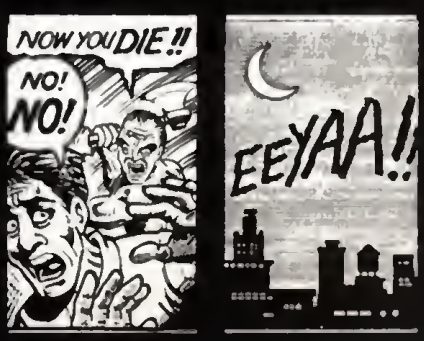






THE *NEXT* TYPE TAKES US FROM ***SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT*** WHILE STAYING WITHIN A SCENE OR IDEA. NOTE THE DEGREE OF *READER INVOLVEMENT* NECESSARY TO RENDER THESE TRANSITIONS *MEANINGFUL*.

3.



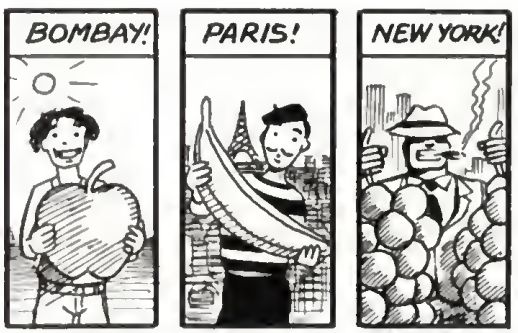




DEDUCTIVE REASONING IS OFTEN REQUIRED IN READING COMICS SUCH AS IN THESE ***SCENE--TO-SCENE*** TRANSITIONS, WHICH TRANSPORT US ACROSS *SIGNIFICANT DISTANCES* OF *TIME* AND *SPACE*.

4.







A *FIFTH* TYPE OF TRANSITION, WHICH WE'LL CALL ***ASPECT-TO-ASPECT,*** BYPASSES *TIME* FOR THE MOST PART AND SETS A *WANDERING EYE* ON DIFFERENT *ASPECTS* OF A PLACE, IDEA OR MOOD.

5.







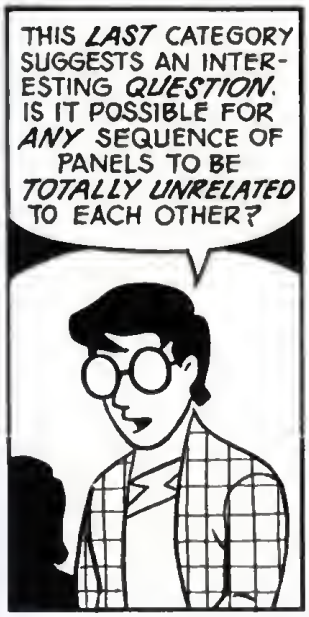
AND FINALLY, THERE'S THE ***NON-SEQUITUR,*** WHICH OFFERS NO LOGICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PANELS *WHATSOEVER!*

6.



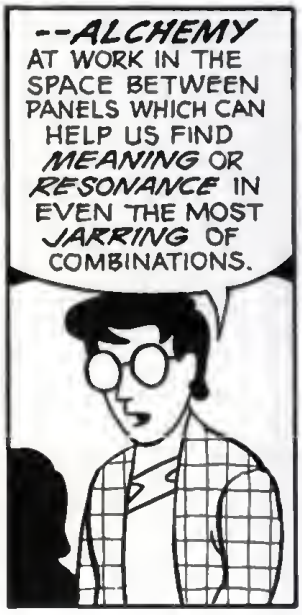





THIS *LAST* CATEGORY SUGGESTS AN INTERESTING *QUESTION*. IS IT POSSIBLE FOR *ANY* SEQUENCE OF PANELS TO BE *TOTALLY UNRELATED* TO EACH OTHER?


PERSONALLY, I DON'T *THINK* SO.
NO MATTER HOW *DISSIMILAR* ONE IMAGE MAY BE TO ANOTHER, THERE IS A KIND OF--




--ALCHEMY AT WORK IN THE SPACE BETWEEN PANELS WHICH CAN HELP US FIND *MEANING* OR *RESONANCE* IN EVEN THE MOST *JARRING* OF COMBINATIONS.


SUCH TRANSITIONS MAY NOT MAKE "*SENSE*" IN ANY TRADITIONAL WAY, BUT STILL A RELATIONSHIP OF *SOME* SORT WILL INEVITABLY *DEVELOP*.

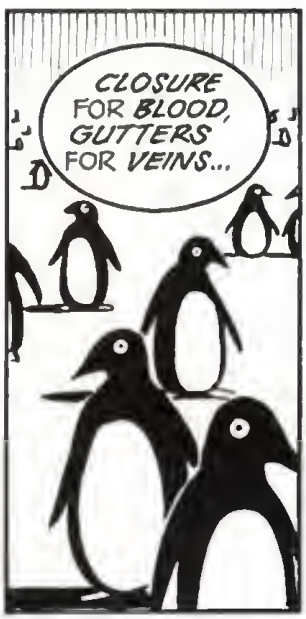

BANG!

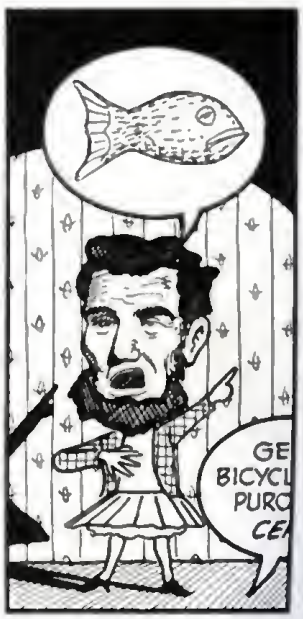

BY CREATING A *SEQUENCE* WITH TWO OR MORE IMAGES, WE ARE *ENDOWING* THEM WITH A *SINGLE*--

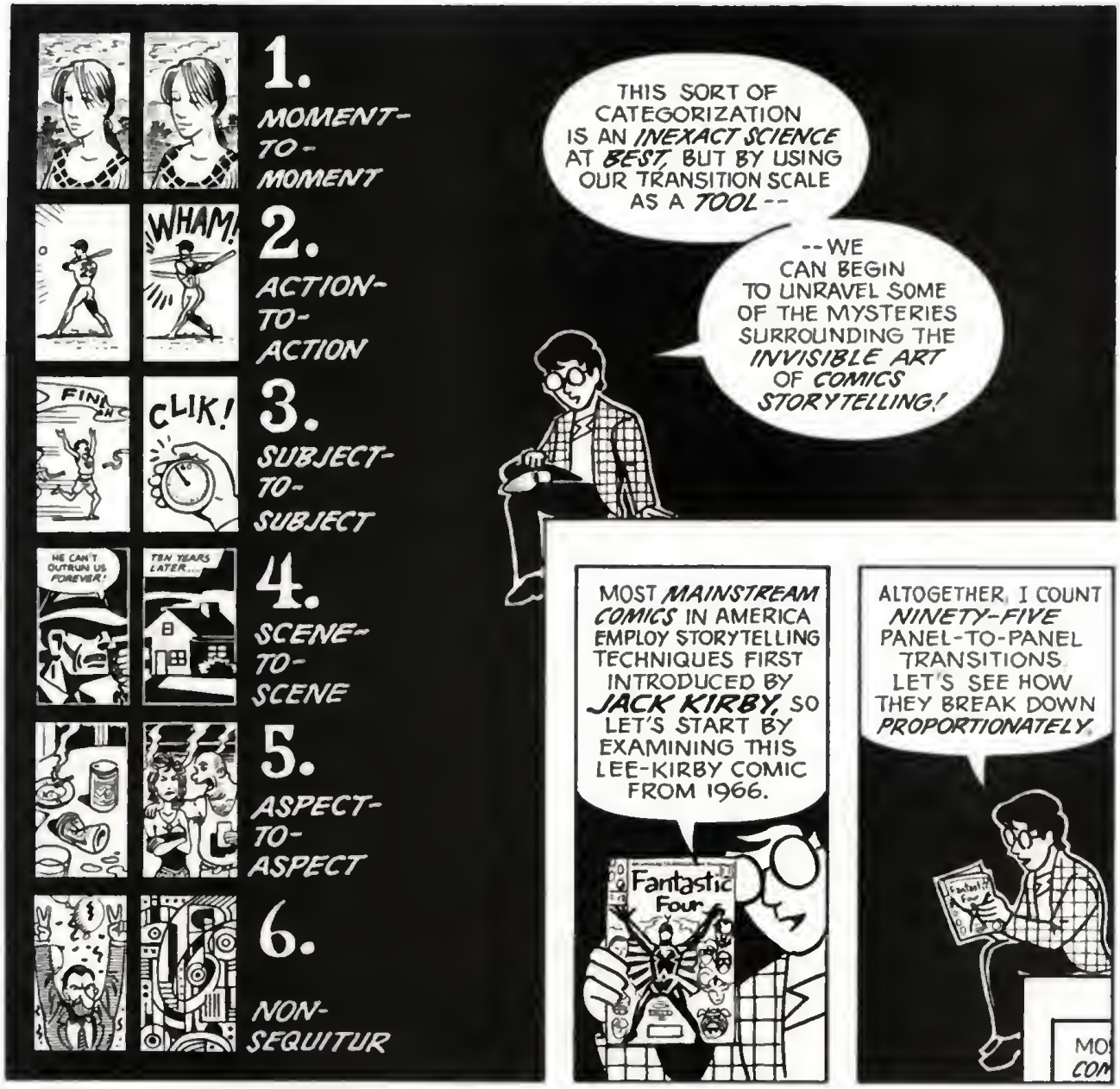

--OVERRIDING IDENTITY, AND *FORCING* THE VIEWER TO CONSIDER THEM AS A *WHOLE*.


HOWEVER *DIFFERENT* THEY HAD BEEN, THEY NOW BELONG TO A *SINGLE ORGANISM*.

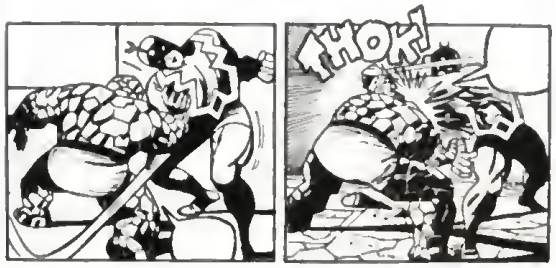

DANGER!!!!!


CLOSURE FOR *BLOOD*, *GUTTERS* FOR *VEINS*...


GE
BICYCL
PURO
CE



BY FAR, THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF TRANSITION IN KIRBY'S ART IS ACTION-TO-ACTION. I COUNT SIXTY-TWO OF THEM IN THIS STORY-- ABOUT SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER.



[TRACED AND SIMPLIFIED FOR CLARITY'S SAKE.]

SUBJECT-TO-SUBJECT TRANSITIONS ACCOUNT FOR AN ADDITIONAL NINETEEN-- ABOUT TWENTY PERCENT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER.

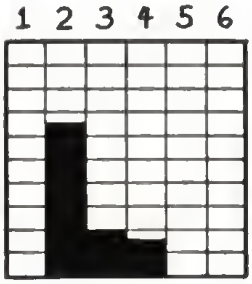


ART © MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC.

AND SINCE ALL OF THE REMAINING TRANSITIONS ARE FROM SCENE-TO-SCENE, WE HAVE THE FOLLOWING BREAKDOWN.

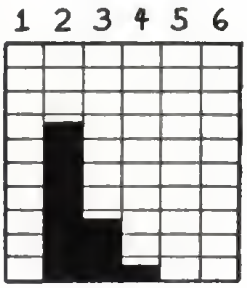
1	—
2	65%
3	20%
4	15%
5	—
6	—

AS A BAR GRAPH IT WOULD LOOK SOMETHING LIKE THIS.



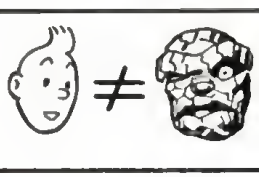
THIS EMPHASIS ON ACTION-TO-ACTION STORYTELLING SUITS MOST PEOPLE'S IDEAS ABOUT KIRBY. BUT IS HE UNIQUE IN THIS RESPECT?

APPARENTLY NOT! HERE'S A GRAPH OF PANEL TRANSITIONS IN HERGÉ'S TINTIN AND THE PROPORTION ARE VERY SIMILAR TO KIRBY'S





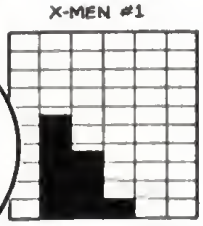
NOW, HERGÉ'S AND KIRBY'S STYLES ARE NOT SIMILAR! IN FACT, THEY'RE RADICALLY DIFFERENT!!



IS THERE SOME KIND OF UNIVERSAL PROPORTION AT WORK HERE, OR IS THERE ANOTHER COMMON LINK? MAYBE A SIMILARITY OF GENRES?

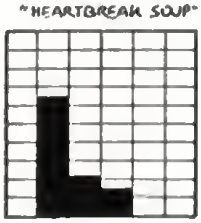
A RANDOM SAMPLING OF VARIOUS AMERICAN COMICS SHOWS THIS SAME PROPORTION PRETTY CONSISTENTLY.

X-MEN #1



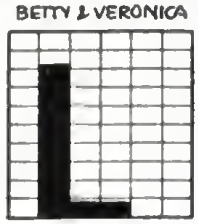
CLAREMONT & LEE

"HEARTBREAK SOUP"



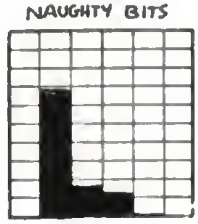
G. HERNANDEZ

BETTY & VERONICA



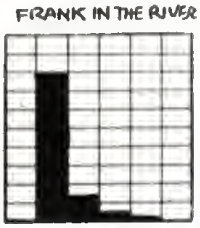
DOYLE & DECARLO

NAUGHTY BITS



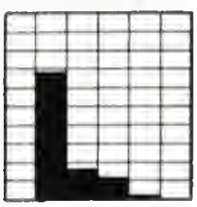
GREGORY

FRANK IN THE RIVER



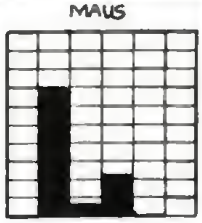
WOODRING

A CONTRACT WITH GOD



EISNER

MAUS



SPIEGELMAN

DONALD DUCK

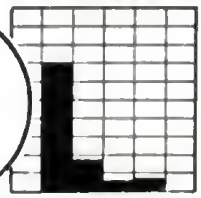


BARKS

A SURVEY OF WELL-KNOWN *EUROPEAN* ARTISTS YEILDS *SIMILAR*, IF NOT *QUITE* AS UNIFORM, RESULTS.

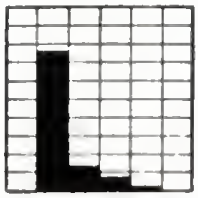
WHAT CAN WE *DEDUCE* FROM THIS?

SQUEAK THE MOUSE



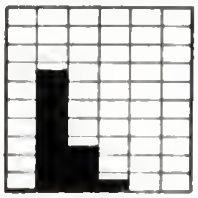
MATTIOLI

ASTERIX



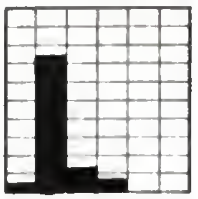
GOSCINNY & UDERZO

WELCOME TO AFLOLOL



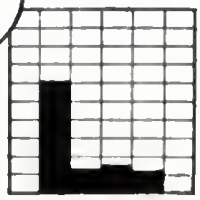
CRISTIN & MEZIERES

THE LONG TOMORROW



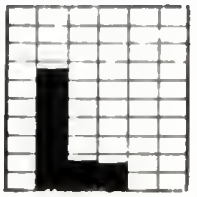
O'BANNON & MOEBIUS

"MANHATTAN"



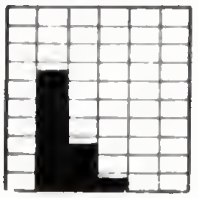
TARDI

CLIK'



MANARA

THE BLACK ISLAND



HERGÉ

"THE CLOCK STRIKES"



JOOST SWARTE

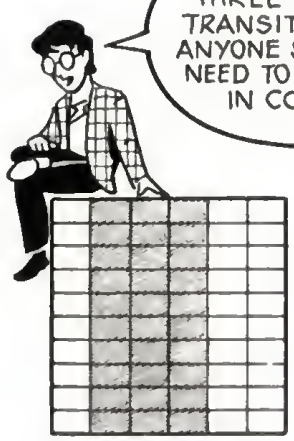


2

3

4

ARE THESE THREE TYPES OF TRANSITIONS ALL ANYONE SHOULD EVER NEED TO TELL A STORY IN COMICS?

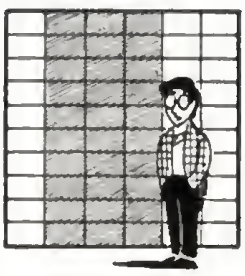


IF WE CHOOSE TO SEE STORIES AS CONNECTED SERIES OF *EVENTS* THEN THE PREDOMINANCE OF TYPES 2-4 ARE EASILY EXPLAINED



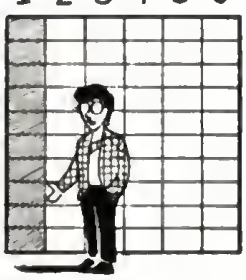
TYPES 2-4 SHOW THINGS *HAPPENING* IN *CONCISE, EFFICIENT WAYS.*

1 2 3 4 5 6



TYPE 1 SHOWS *ACTIONS* LIKE TYPE 2, BUT IT TENDS TO REQUIRE *SEVERAL PANELS* TO DO WHAT TYPE 2 DOES IN *TWO*--

1 2 3 4 5 6



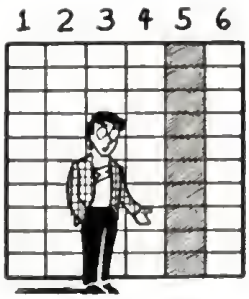


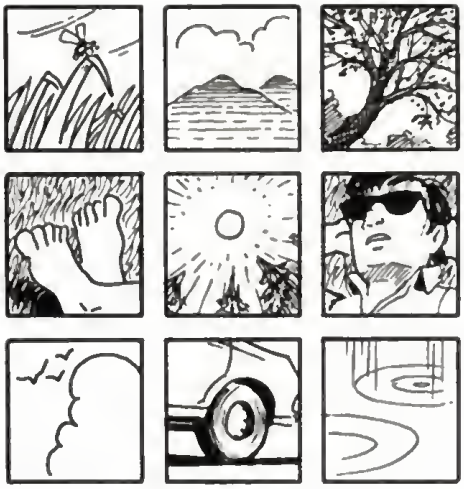
1.



2.

--WHILE IN THE *FIFTH* TYPE, BY DEFINITION, NOTHING *"HAPPENS"* AT ALL!





AND, OF COURSE, NON-SEQUITURS ARE UNCONCERNED WITH *EVENTS* OR ANY *NARRATIVE* PURPOSES OF ANY SORT.

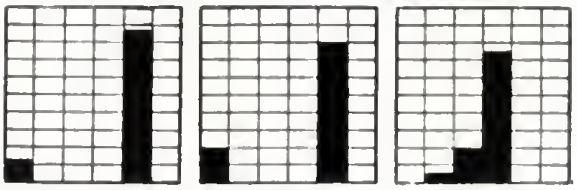




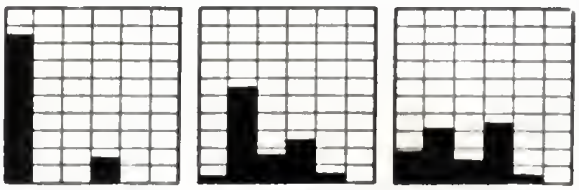
SOME *EXPERIMENTAL COMICS*, LIKE THOSE OF *ART SPIEGELMAN'S* EARLY PERIOD, EXPLORE A *FULL RANGE* OF TRANSITIONS--

--THOUGH GENERALLY IN THE SERVICE OF EQUALLY RADICAL STORIES AND SUBJECTS.

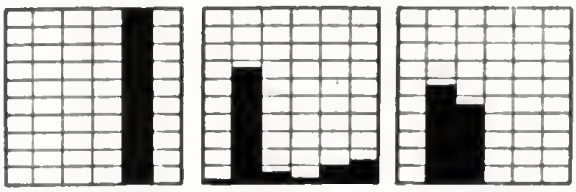
STORIES FROM SPIEGELMAN'S ANTHOLOGY BREAKDOWNS:



"DON'T GET AROUND MUCH ANYMORE" *INTRODUCTION* *"MAUS" (ORIGINAL)*



"SKINLESS PERKINS" *"PRISONER ON THE HELL PLANET"* *"CRACKING JOKES"*

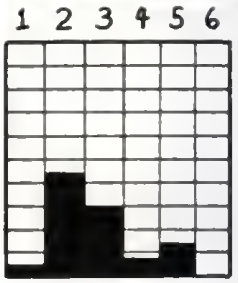


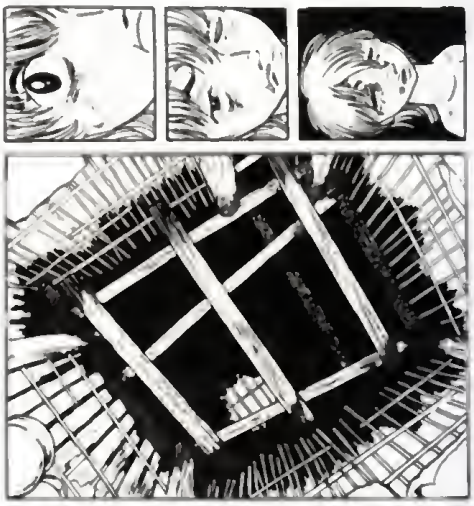
FRONT AND BACK COVERS *"ACE-HOLE, MIDGET DETECTIVE"* *"REAL DREAM" 1975*

BUT BEFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT TYPES 2-4 HAVE A MONOPOLY ON *STRAIGHTFORWARD* STORYTELLING, LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT *OSAMU TEZUKA* FROM *JAPAN.*



TEZUKA IS A *FAR CRY* FROM THE EARLY SPIEGELMAN. HIS STORYTELLING IS CLEAR AND STRAIGHTFORWARD. *BUT LOOK AT HOW HE CHARTS!*





JUST WHAT IS *GOING ON* HERE?

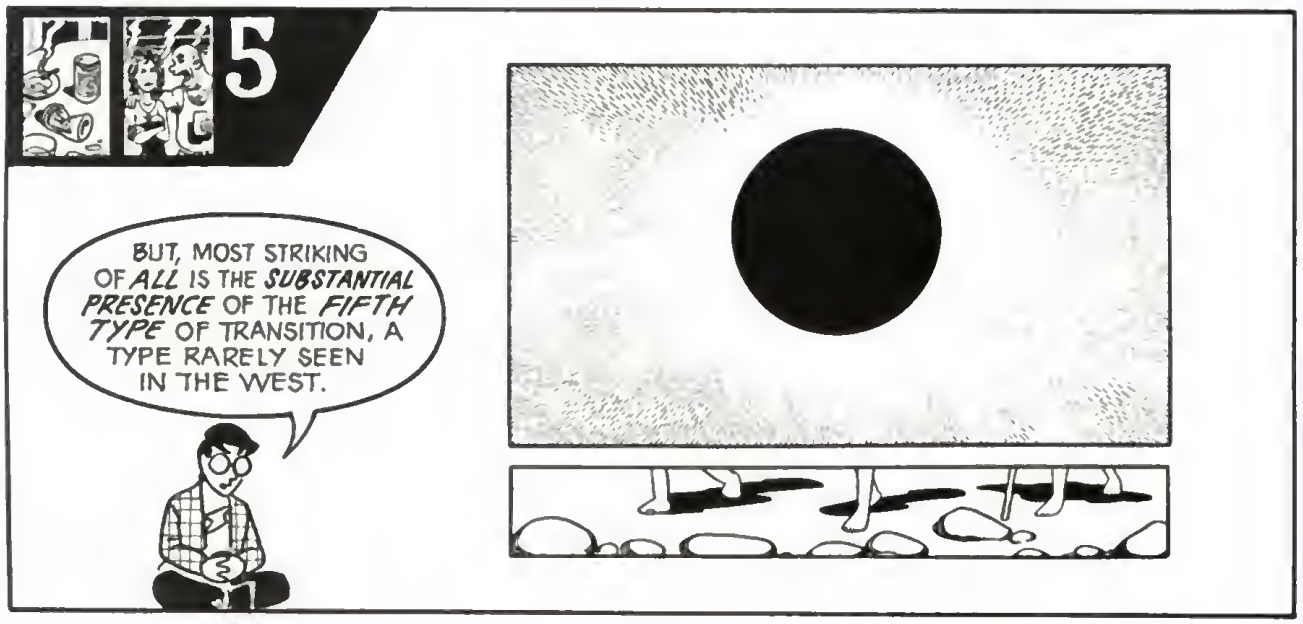
ART © OSAMU TEZUKA





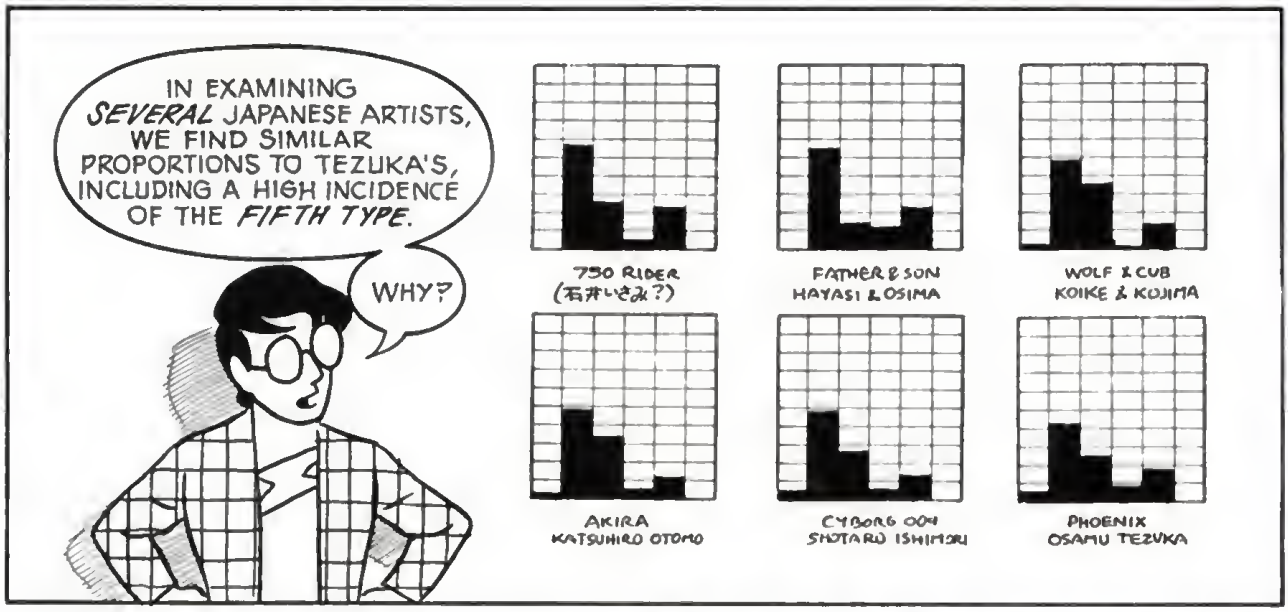




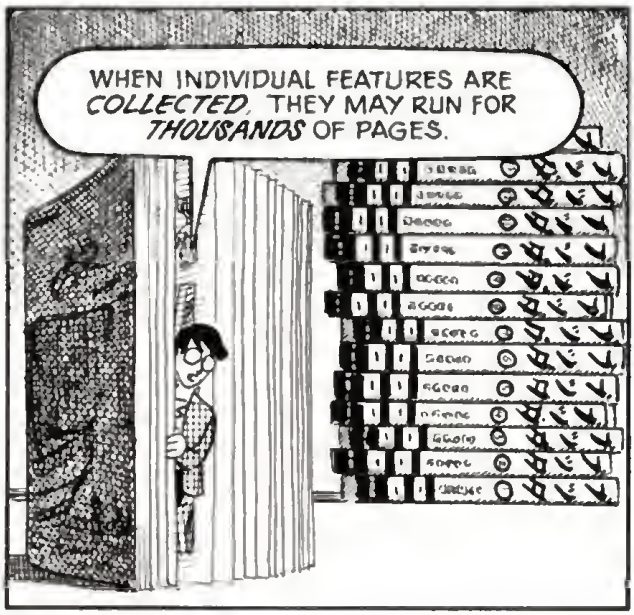


ART © OSAMU TEZUKA.


ASPECT-TO-ASPECT TRANSITIONS HAVE BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF JAPANESE MAINSTREAM COMICS ALMOST FROM THE VERY BEGINNING.
水木は 夜の 古寺にいって みることにした
ART © SHIGERU MIZUKI
MOST OFTEN USED TO ESTABLISH A MOOD OR A SENSE OF PLACE, TIME SEEMS TO STAND STILL IN THESE QUIET, CONTEMPLATIVE COMBINATIONS.
EVEN SEQUENCE, WHILE STILL AN ISSUE, SEEMS FAR LESS IMPORTANT HERE THAN IN OTHER TRANSITIONS.
ART © OSAMU TEZUKA
RATHER THAN ACTING AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN SEPARATE MOMENTS, THE READER HERE MUST ASSEMBLE A SINGLE MOMENT USING SCATTERED FRAGMENTS.
ART © H. SATO

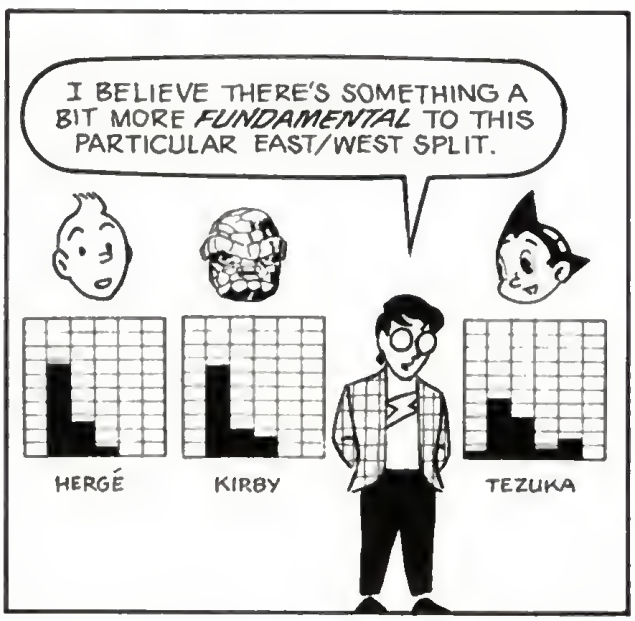

IN EXAMINING *SEVERAL* JAPANESE ARTISTS, WE FIND SIMILAR PROPORTIONS TO TEZUKA'S, INCLUDING A HIGH INCIDENCE OF THE *FIFTH TYPE*.
WHY?
750 RIDER (石井いさみ?)
FATHER & SON HAYASI & OSIMA
WOLF & CUB KOIKE & KOJIMA
AKIRA KATSUHIRO OTOMO
CYBORG 009 SHOTARO ISHIMORI
PHOENIX OSAMU TEZUKA


LENGTH MAY BE ONE OF THE FACTORS AT WORK HERE. MOST JAPANESE COMICS FIRST APPEAR IN ENORMOUS *ANTHOLOGY* TITLES WHERE THE PRESSURE ISN'T AS GREAT ON ANY ONE INSTALLMENT TO SHOW A LOT *"HAPPENING."*


WHEN INDIVIDUAL FEATURES ARE *COLLECTED*, THEY MAY RUN FOR *THOUSANDS* OF PAGES.


AS SUCH, *DOZENS* OF PANELS CAN BE DEVOTED TO PORTRAYING *SLOW CINEMATIC MOVEMENT* OR TO *SETTING A MOOD*.


BUT I DON'T THINK *LONGER STORIES* ARE THE *ONLY* FACTOR, OR EVEN THE MOST *IMPORTANT* ONE.


I BELIEVE THERE'S SOMETHING A BIT MORE *FUNDAMENTAL* TO THIS PARTICULAR EAST/WEST SPLIT.
HERGÉ
KIRBY
TEZUKA




MMM... WHERE WAS I?
OH, YES ...


TRADITIONAL WESTERN ART AND LITERATURE DON'T WANDER MUCH. ON THE WHOLE, WE'RE A PRETTY GOAL-ORIENTED CULTURE.


BUT, IN THE EAST, THERE'S A RICH TRADITION OF CYCLICAL AND LABYRINTHINE WORKS OF ART.


JAPANESE COMICS MAY BE HEIRS TO THIS TRADITION, IN THE WAY THEY SO OFTEN EMPHASIZE BEING THERE OVER GETTING THERE.


THROUGH THESE AND OTHER STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES, THE JAPANESE OFFER A VISION OF COMICS VERY DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN.


FOR IN JAPAN MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, COMICS IS AN ART--

--OF *INTERVALS.*

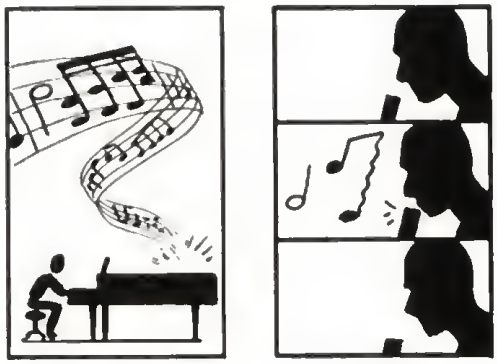
THE IDEA THAT ELEMENTS *OMITTED* FROM A WORK OF ART ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THAT WORK AS THOSE *INCLUDED* HAS BEEN A SPECIALTY OF THE *EAST* FOR *CENTURIES.*

IN THE GRAPHIC ARTS THIS HAS MEANT A GREATER FOCUS ON *FIGURE/GROUND* RELATIONSHIPS AND *"NEGATIVE SPACE."*



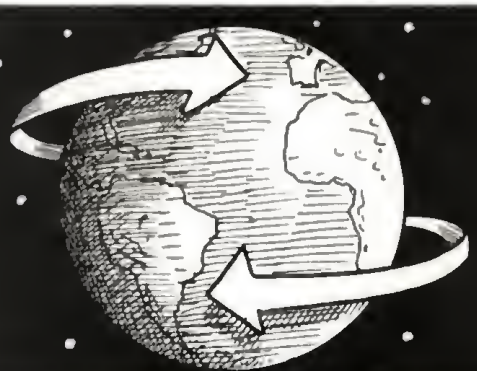
"THE GREAT WAVE OFF KANAG'AWA" BY HOKUSAI (c.1829) (TURN THIS PICTURE UPSIDE DOWN TO SEE THE *OTHER* WAVE OF NEGATIVE SPACE...NATURE'S *YIN AND YANG.*)

IN MUSIC TOO, WHILE THE WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION WAS EMPHASIZING THE *CONTINUOUS, CONNECTED* WORLDS OF MELODY AND HARMONY, EASTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC WAS EQUALLY CONCERNED WITH THE ROLE OF *SILENCE!*



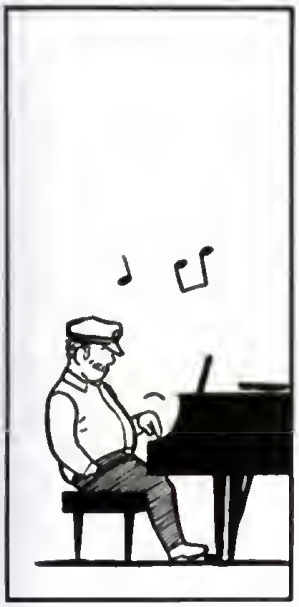
WEST *EAST*

IN THE LAST *CENTURY* OR TWO, AS *WESTERN* CULTURAL INFLUENCES SWEPT THE *EAST,* SO TOO HAVE *EASTERN* AND *AFRICAN* IDEAS OF *FRAGMENTATION* AND *RHYTHM* SWEPT THE *WEST.*



FROM *DEBUSSY* TO *STRAVINSKY* TO *COUNT BASIE,* WESTERN MUSIC HAS GRADUALLY INCORPORATED A STRONG AWARENESS OF THE POWER OF *FRAGMENTATION* AND *INTERVALS.*





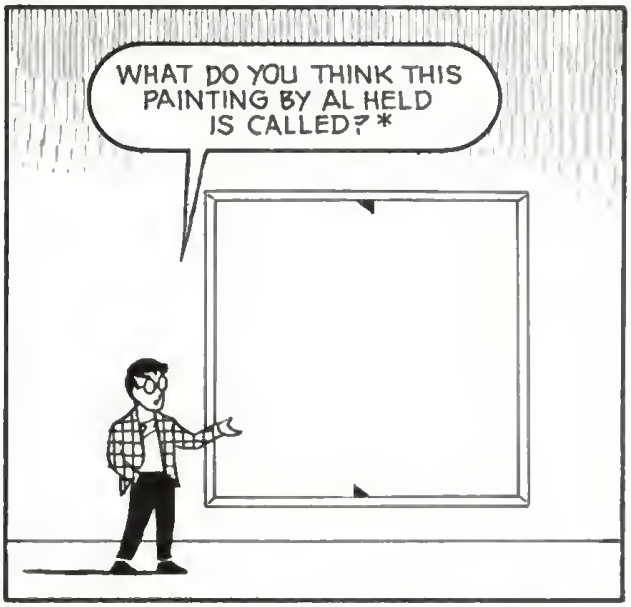


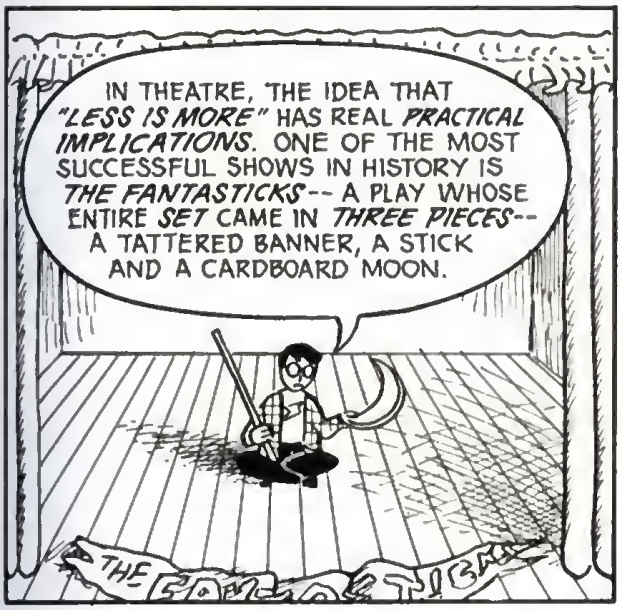


THE TRADITIONAL EMPHASIS IN WESTERN ART UPON THE PRIMACY OF *FOREGROUND* SUBJECTS AND *CONTINUOUSNESS* OF *TONES* GAVE WAY TO *FRAGMENTATION* AND A NEW AWARENESS OF THE *PICTURE PLANE*.



FACSIMILE OF "FIGURE" BY PABLO PICASSO 1948







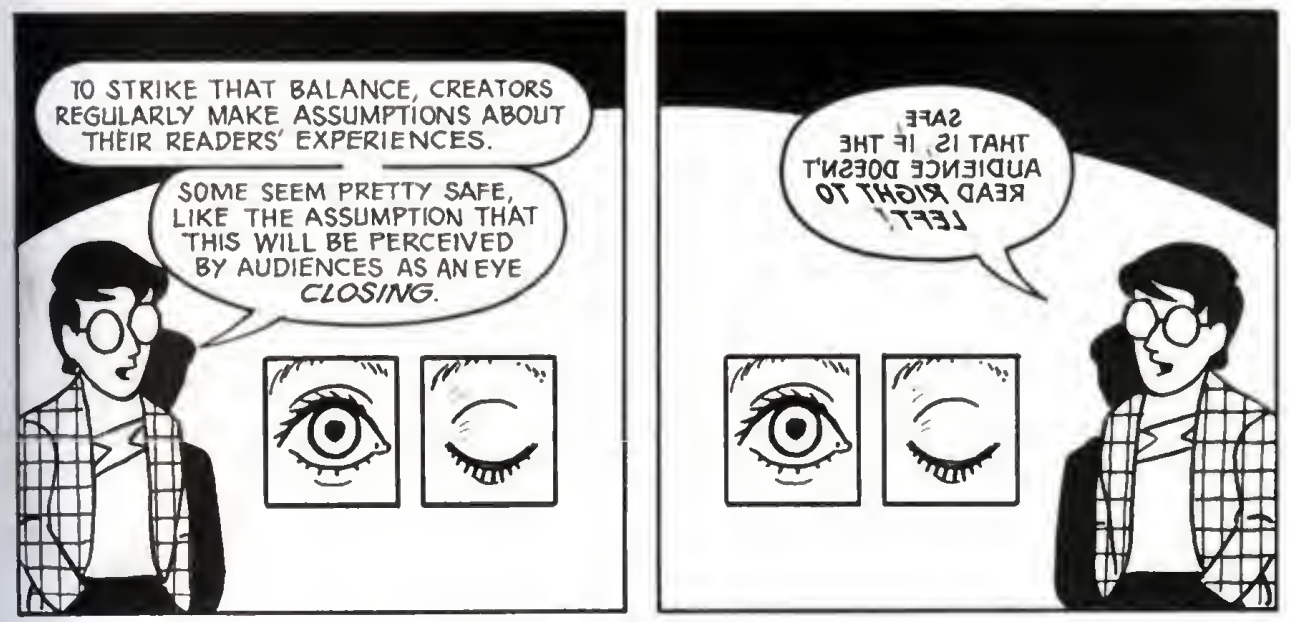
*ANSWER: "THE BIG 'N'"
[SEE PAGE 216]

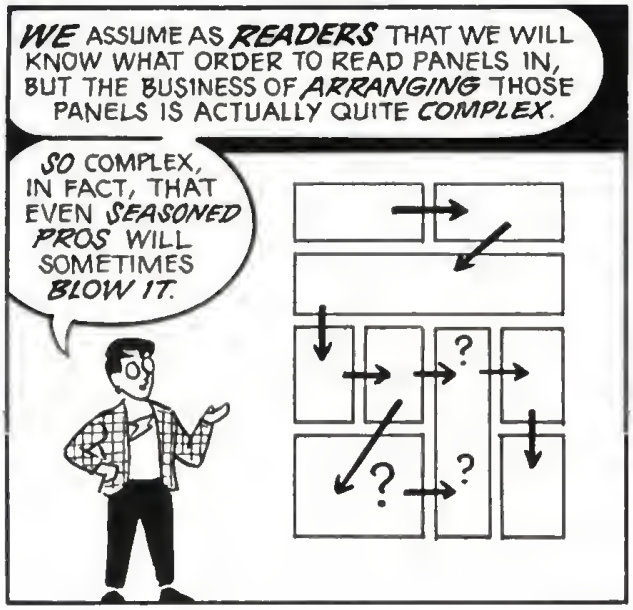


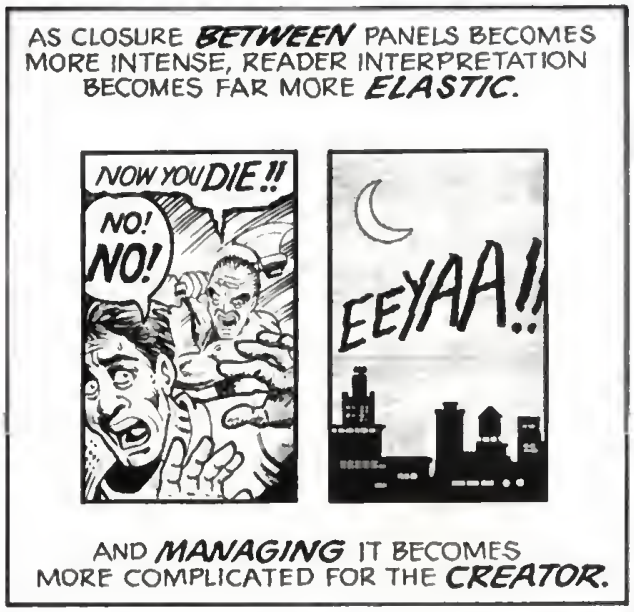
* "BRUM" APPEARS COURTESY OF M FEAZELL


HERE'S A STORY.
PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.
I PROMISE
BRUM!
HERE I AM!
HI, CARL!
HI, DAISY!
I'M SORRY, CARL, BUT I CAN'T GO OUT WITH YOU TONIGHT
AWW!
WHAT'LL I DO NOW?
I'LL BUY SOME BEERS.
GLUG! GLUG!
BUD
CRASH!
RIP. CARL
END
HERE'S A STORY.
PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.
I PROMISE
GLUG! GLUG!
BUD
CRASH!
RIP. CARL
END

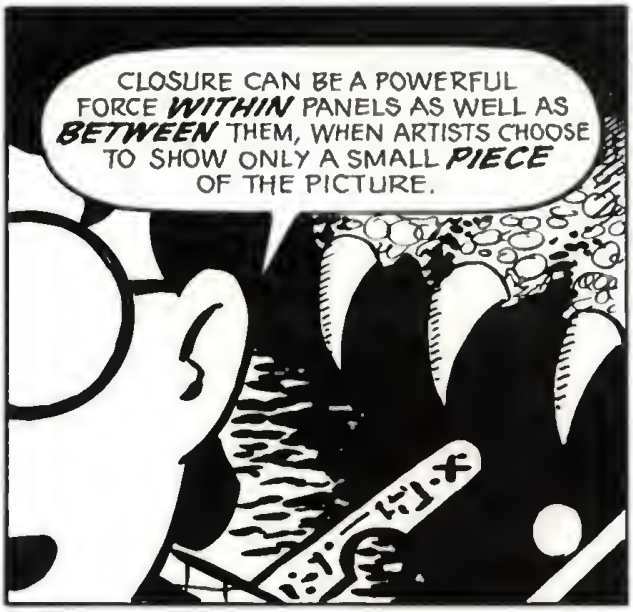

THE ART OF COMICS IS AS SUBTRACTIVE AN ART AS IT IS ADDITIVE.
PROMISE ME YOU WON'T DRINK AND DRIVE, CARL.
I PROMISE
RIP. CARL
END
AND FINDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE IS CRUCIAL TO COMICS CREATORS THE WORLD OVER.

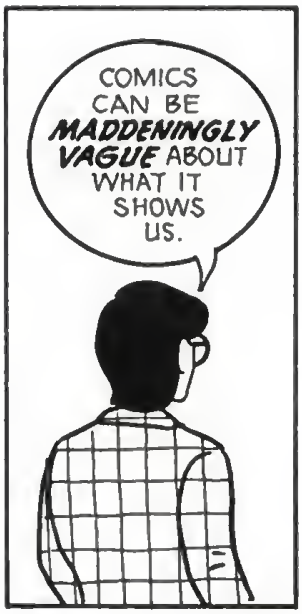

TO STRIKE THAT BALANCE, CREATORS REGULARLY MAKE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THEIR READERS' EXPERIENCES.
SOME SEEM PRETTY SAFE, LIKE THE ASSUMPTION THAT THIS WILL BE PERCEIVED BY AUDIENCES AS AN EYE CLOSING.
SAFE IS, IF THE AUDIENCE DOESN'T READ RIGHT TO LEFT!


WE ASSUME AS READERS THAT WE WILL KNOW WHAT ORDER TO READ PANELS IN, BUT THE BUSINESS OF ARRANGING THOSE PANELS IS ACTUALLY QUITE COMPLEX.
SO COMPLEX, IN FACT, THAT EVEN SEASONED PROS WILL SOMETIMES BLOW IT.
?
?
?


AS CLOSURE BETWEEN PANELS BECOMES MORE INTENSE, READER INTERPRETATION BECOMES FAR MORE ELASTIC.
NOW YOU DIE!!
NO! NO!
EEYAA!!
AND MANAGING IT BECOMES MORE COMPLICATED FOR THE CREATOR.

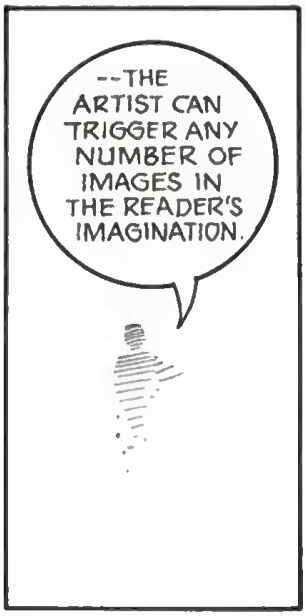

SOME ARTISTS CAN BE DELIBERATELY AMBIGUOUS, OF COURSE, AND OFFER US NO STRICT INTERPRETATION TO GO ON.

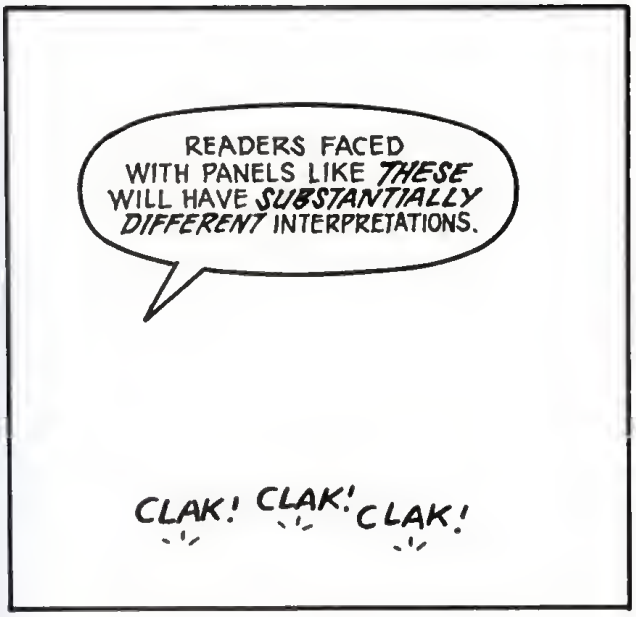

CLOSURE CAN BE A POWERFUL FORCE WITHIN PANELS AS WELL AS BETWEEN THEM, WHEN ARTISTS CHOOSE TO SHOW ONLY A SMALL PIECE OF THE PICTURE.


COMICS CAN BE MADDENINGLY VAGUE ABOUT WHAT IT SHOWS US.


BY SHOWING LITTLE OR NOTHING OF A GIVEN SCENE--

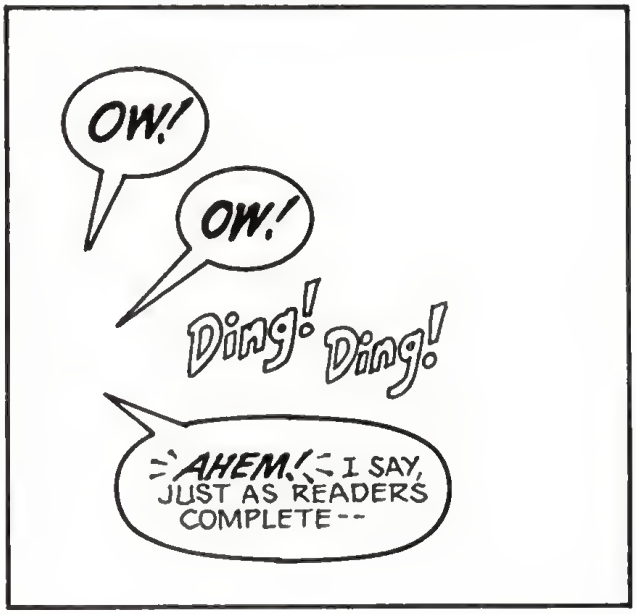

--AND OFFERING ONLY CLUES TO THE READER--


--THE ARTIST CAN TRIGGER ANY NUMBER OF IMAGES IN THE READER'S IMAGINATION.


READERS FACED WITH PANELS LIKE THESE WILL HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS.
CLAK! CLAK! CLAK!

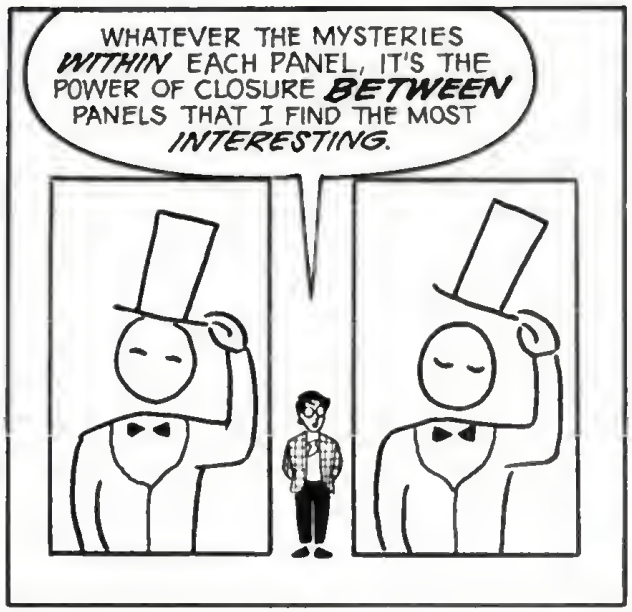

BY CONSTRUCTING WHOLE IMAGES BASED ON THESE FRAGMENTS, READERS ARE PERFORMING CLOSURE, JUST AS--
WHOOSH!
Splip Splip


?
Ding! Ding!
UH--JUST AS READERS COMPLETE AN ACTION OR IDEA BETWEEN--


OW!
OW!
Ding! Ding!
AHEM! I SAY, JUST AS READERS COMPLETE--

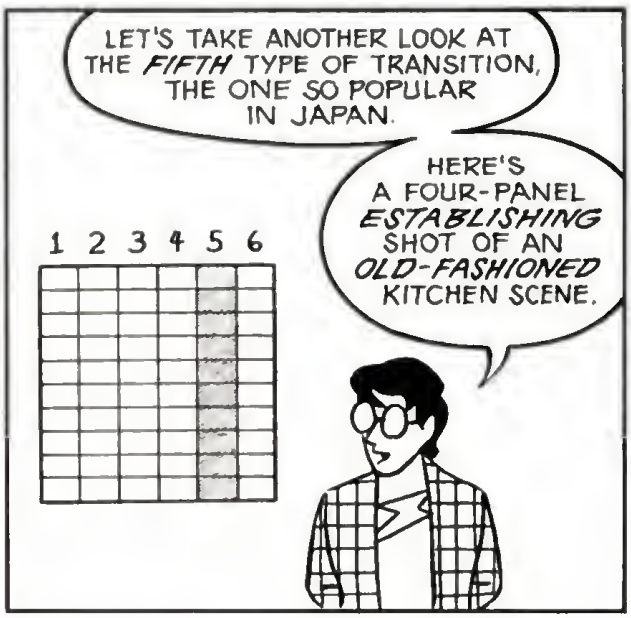

--AN ACTION OR--
OW! OW!
STOP THAT!
Ding! Ding!
OW!

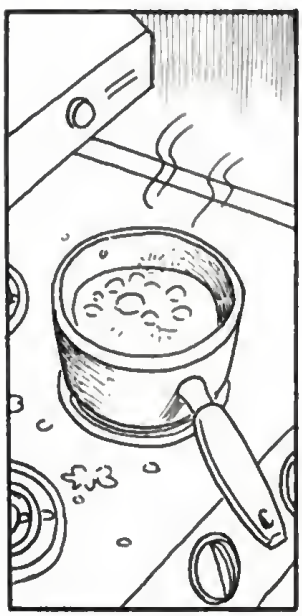

Ding! Ding!
OW!


WHATEVER THE MYSTERIES *WITHIN* EACH PANEL, IT'S THE POWER OF CLOSURE ***BETWEEN*** PANELS THAT I FIND THE MOST *INTERESTING*.

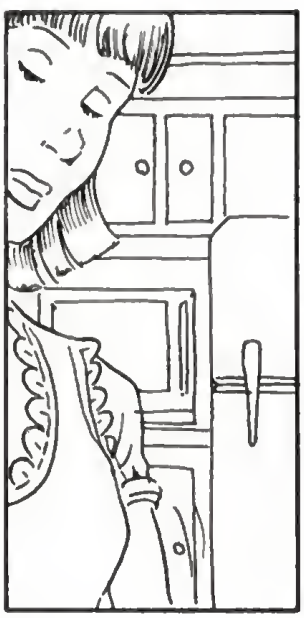

THERE'S SOMETHING *STRANGE* AND *WONDERFUL* THAT HAPPENS IN THIS *BLANK RIBBON OF PAPER*.


WE ALREADY KNOW THAT COMICS ASKS THE MIND TO WORK AS A SORT OF *IN-BETWEENER* -- FILLING IN THE GAPS BETWEEN PANELS AS AN *ANIMATOR* MIGHT-- BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S STILL MORE TO IT THAN THAT.


LET'S TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE *FIFTH* TYPE OF TRANSITION, THE ONE SO POPULAR IN JAPAN.
HERE'S A FOUR-PANEL *ESTABLISHING* SHOT OF AN *OLD-FASHIONED* KITCHEN SCENE.
1 2 3 4 5 6




CHOP!
CHOP!
CHOP!




K TIK TIK TIK TIK

NOW, MOST OF YOU SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE *PERCEIVING* THAT YOU'RE IN A KITCHEN FROM THOSE FOUR PANELS *ALONE*.

WITH A *HIGH DEGREE* OF *CLOSURE*, YOUR MIND IS TAKING FOUR PICTURE *FRAGMENTS* AND CONSTRUCTING AN ENTIRE SCENE *OUT OF* THOSE FRAGMENTS.

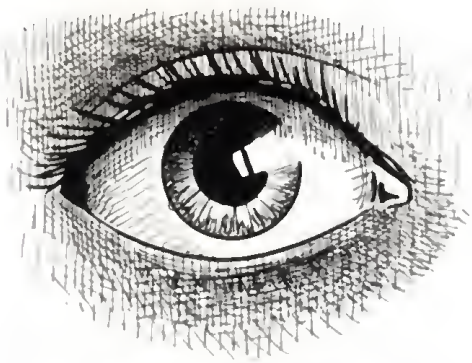
BUT THE SCENE YOUR MIND CONSTRUCTS FROM THOSE *FOUR* PANELS IS A VERY *DIFFERENT PLACE* FROM THE SCENE CONSTRUCTED FROM OUR TRADITIONAL *ONE-PANEL* ESTABLISHING SHOT!

LOOK AGAIN.

YOU'VE BEEN IN KITCHENS BEFORE, YOU KNOW WHAT A POT ON THE BOIL SOUNDS LIKE; DO YOU ONLY HEAR IT IN THAT *FIRST* PANEL?

AND WHAT ABOUT THE *CHOPPING* SOUND? DOES THAT ONLY LAST A *PANEL* OR DOES IT *PERSIST*? CAN YOU *SMELL* THIS KITCHEN? *FEEL* IT? *TASTE* IT?

COMICS IS A *MONO-SENSORY* MEDIUM. IT RELIES ON ONLY *ONE* OF THE SENSES TO CONVEY A *WORLD* OF EXPERIENCE.



BUT WHAT OF THE OTHER *FOUR*?

WE REPRESENT *SOUND* THROUGH DEVICES SUCH AS *WORD BALLOONS*.

WE REPRES[illegible] *SOUND* TH[illegible] CES SUCH [illegible]

BUT ALL IN ALL, IT IS AN *EXCLUSIVELY VISUAL REPRESENTATION*.

WITHIN THESE PANELS, WE CAN ONLY CONVEY INFORMATION *VISUALLY*.

BUT *BETWEEN* PANELS, NONE OF OUR SENSES ARE REQUIRED AT ALL.

WHICH IS WHY *ALL* OF OUR SENSES ARE ENGAGED!









SINCE CARTOONS ALREADY EXIST AS CONCEPTS FOR THE READER, THEY TEND TO FLOW EASILY THROUGH THE CONCEPTUAL TERRITORY *BETWEEN* PANELS.



IDEAS FLOWING INTO ONE ANOTHER *SEAMLESSLY*.

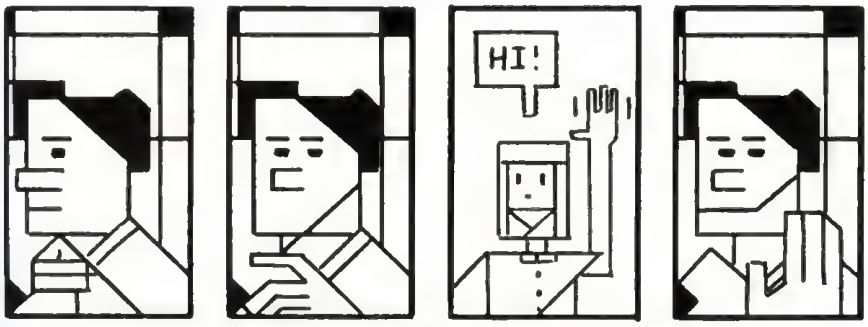
BUT *REALISTIC* IMAGES HAVE A BUMPIER RIDE. THEIRS IS A PRIMARILY *VISUAL* EXISTENCE WHICH DOESN'T PASS EASILY INTO THE REALM OF IDEAS.



AND SO, WHAT SEEMED LIKE A CONTINUOUS SERIES OF MOMENTS IN THE LAST EXAMPLE, HERE LOOKS A LITTLE MORE LIKE A SERIES OF *STILL PICTURES*...



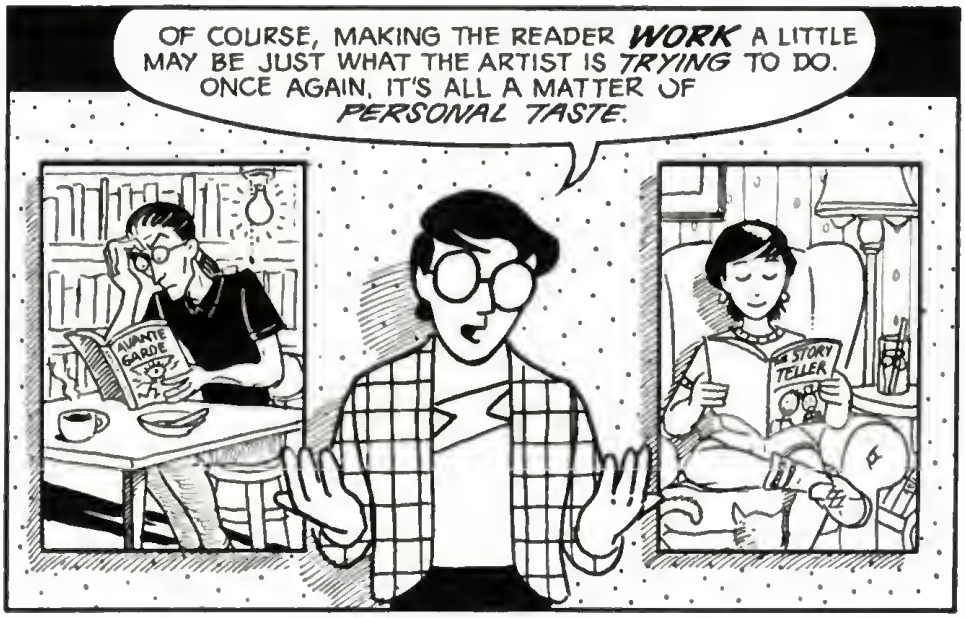
SIMILARLY, I THINK WHEN COMICS ART VEERS CLOSER TO CONCERNS OF THE *PICTURE PLANE*, CLOSURE CAN BE MORE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE, THOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

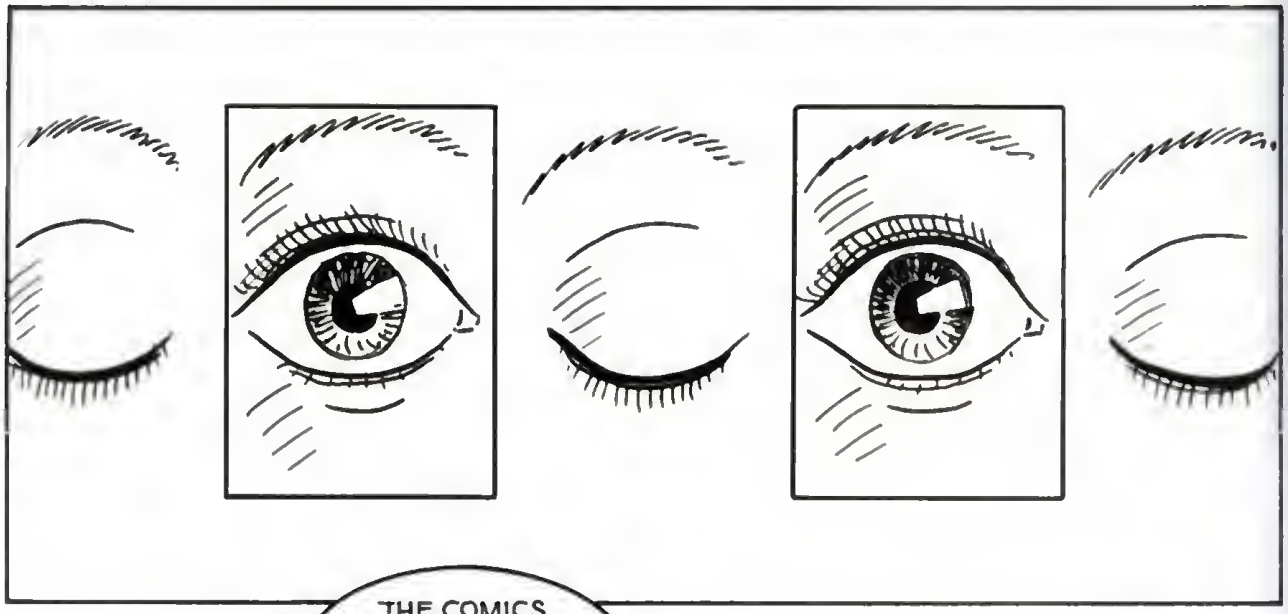


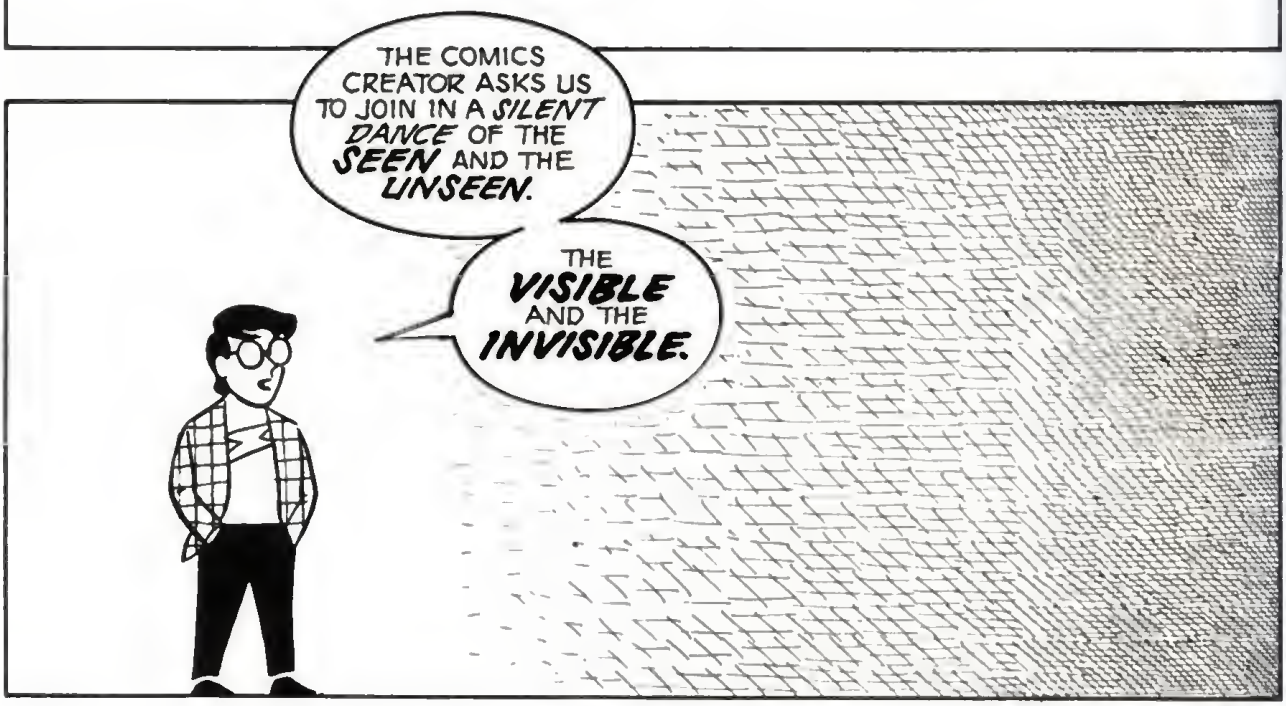
NOW IT'S THE *UNIFYING PROPERTIES* OF *DESIGN* THAT MAKE US MORE AWARE OF THE PAGE AS A *WHOLE*, RATHER THAN ITS INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS, THE *PANELS*.



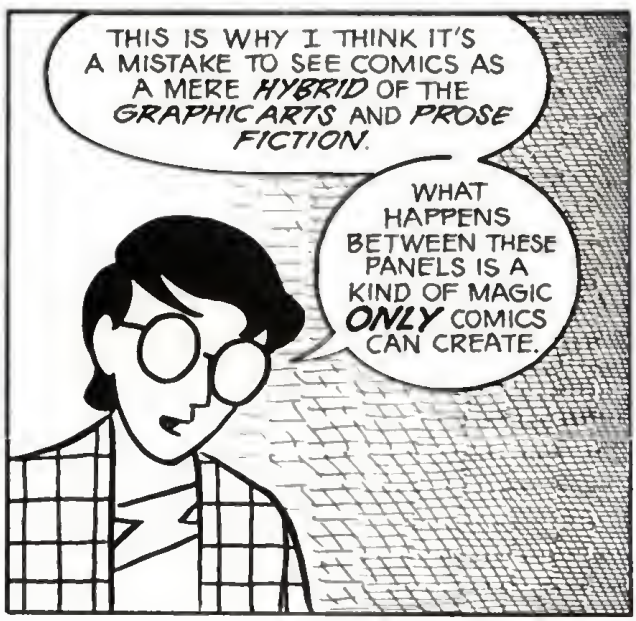






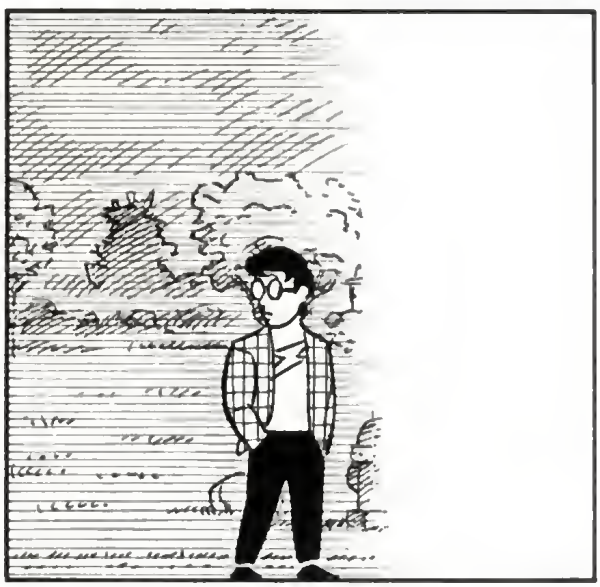

THE COMICS CREATOR ASKS US TO JOIN IN A SILENT DANCE OF THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN.
THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE.

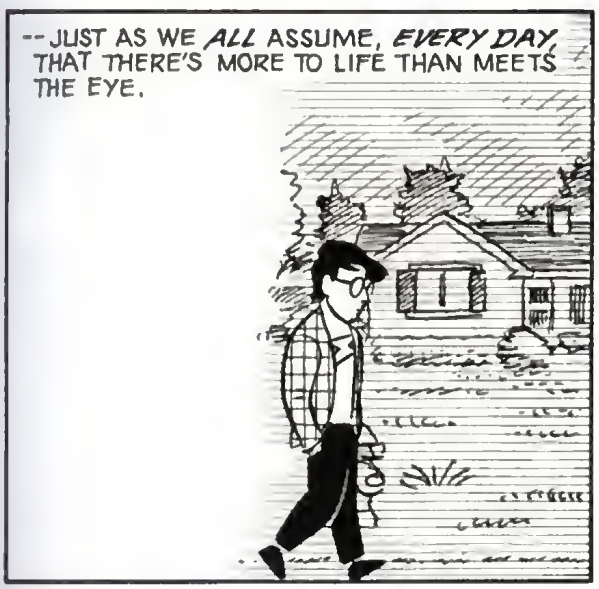

THIS DANCE IS UNIQUE TO COMICS. NO OTHER ARTFORM GIVES SO MUCH TO ITS AUDIENCE WHILE ASKING SO MUCH FROM THEM AS WELL.

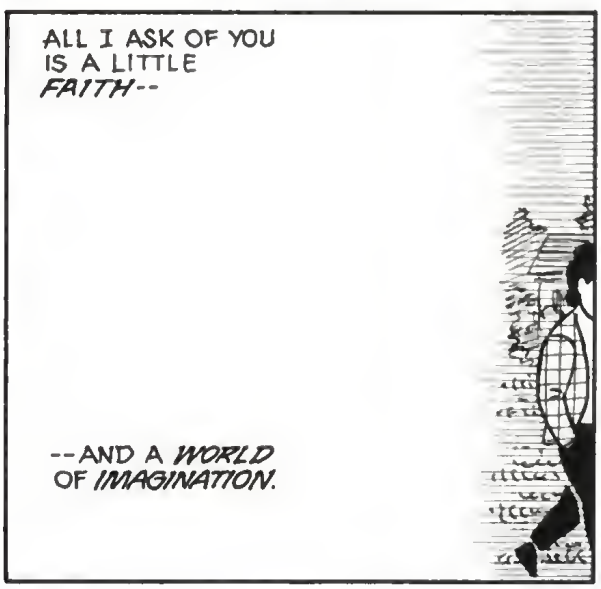

THIS IS WHY I THINK IT'S A MISTAKE TO SEE COMICS AS A MERE HYBRID OF THE GRAPHIC ARTS AND PROSE FICTION.
WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN THESE PANELS IS A KIND OF MAGIC ONLY COMICS CAN CREATE.


HERE IN THIS STUDIO, I'VE TRIED TO *CONTROL* THAT PROCESS AND USE IT TO MAKE MY CASE.
BUT I CAN ONLY *POINT THE WAY.* I CAN'T TAKE YOU *ANYWHERE* YOU DON'T WANT TO *GO.*


ALL I CAN DO IS MAKE *ASSUMPTIONS* ABOUT YOU AND HOPE THAT THEY'RE *CORRECT--*




--JUST AS WE *ALL* ASSUME, *EVERY DAY,* THAT THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN MEETS THE EYE.


ALL I ASK OF YOU IS A LITTLE *FAITH--*
--AND A *WORLD* OF *IMAGINATION.*

CHAPTER FOUR

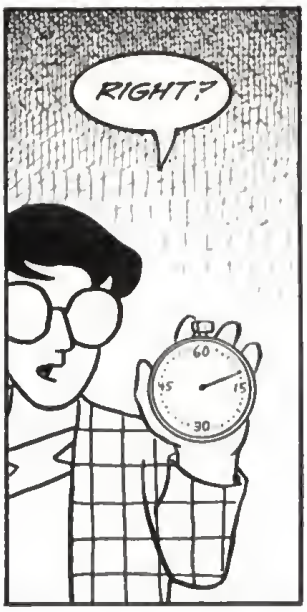
TIME FRAMES.



AND *BETWEEN* THOSE FROZEN MOMENTS -- BETWEEN THE PANELS -- OUR MINDS FILL IN THE *INTERVENING MOMENTS*, CREATING THE ILLUSION OF *TIME AND MOTION.*



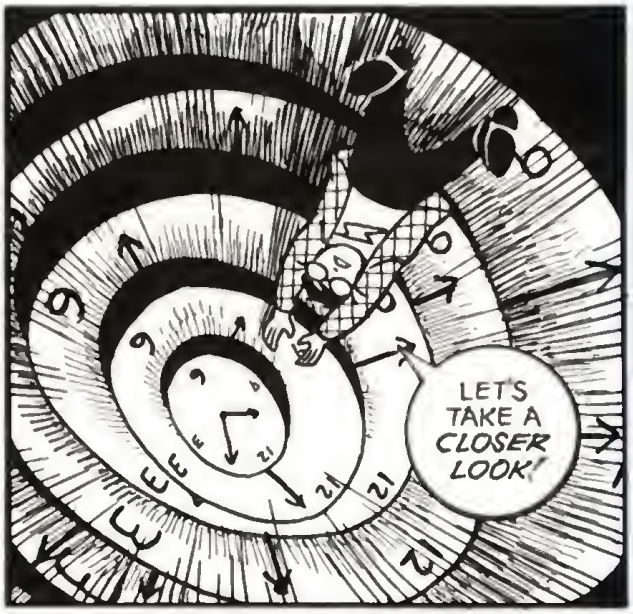
LIKE A LINE DRAWN BETWEEN TWO POINTS.

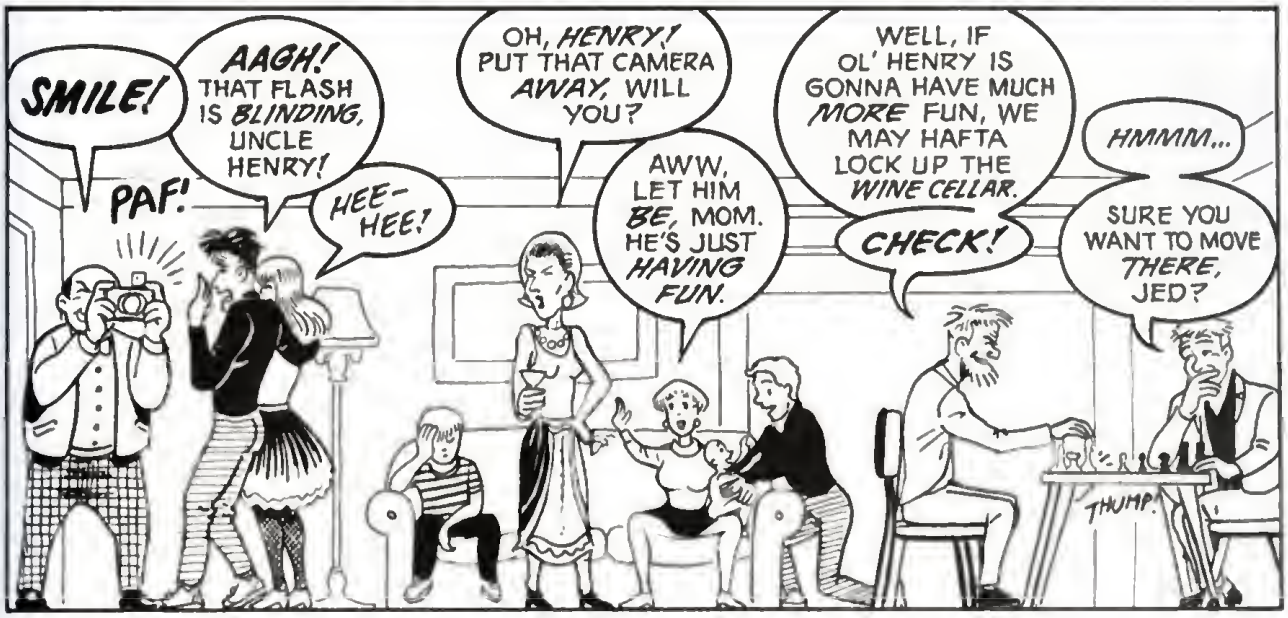




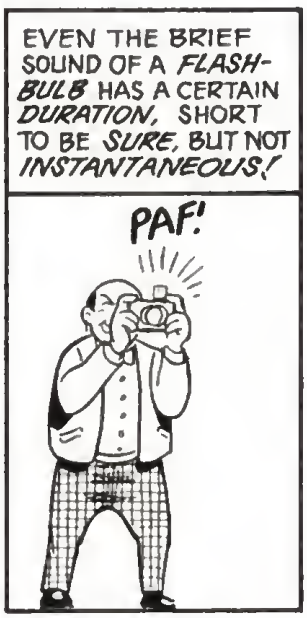




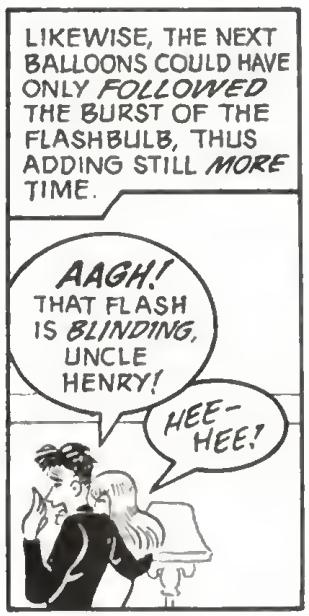


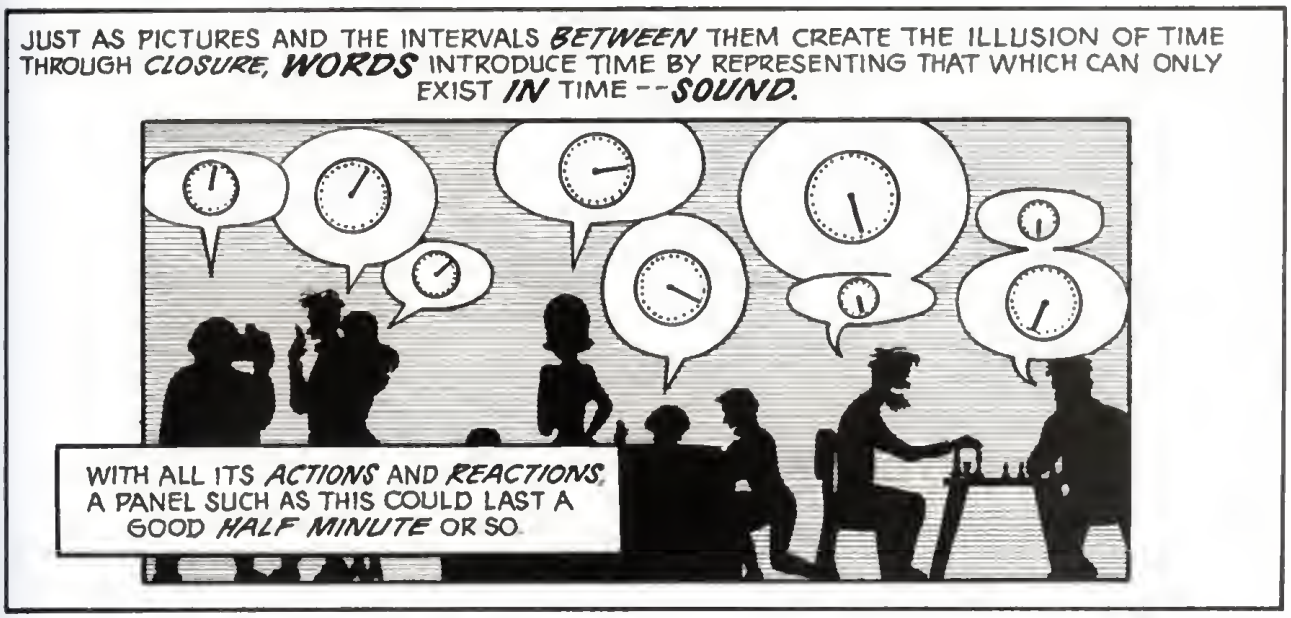

SMILE!
AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!
PAF!
HEE-HEE!
OH, HENRY! PUT THAT CAMERA AWAY, WILL YOU?
AWW, LET HIM BE, MOM. HE'S JUST HAVING FUN.
WELL, IF OL' HENRY IS GONNA HAVE MUCH MORE FUN, WE MAY HAFTA LOCK UP THE WINE CELLAR.
CHECK!
HMMM...
SURE YOU WANT TO MOVE THERE, JED?
THUMP!

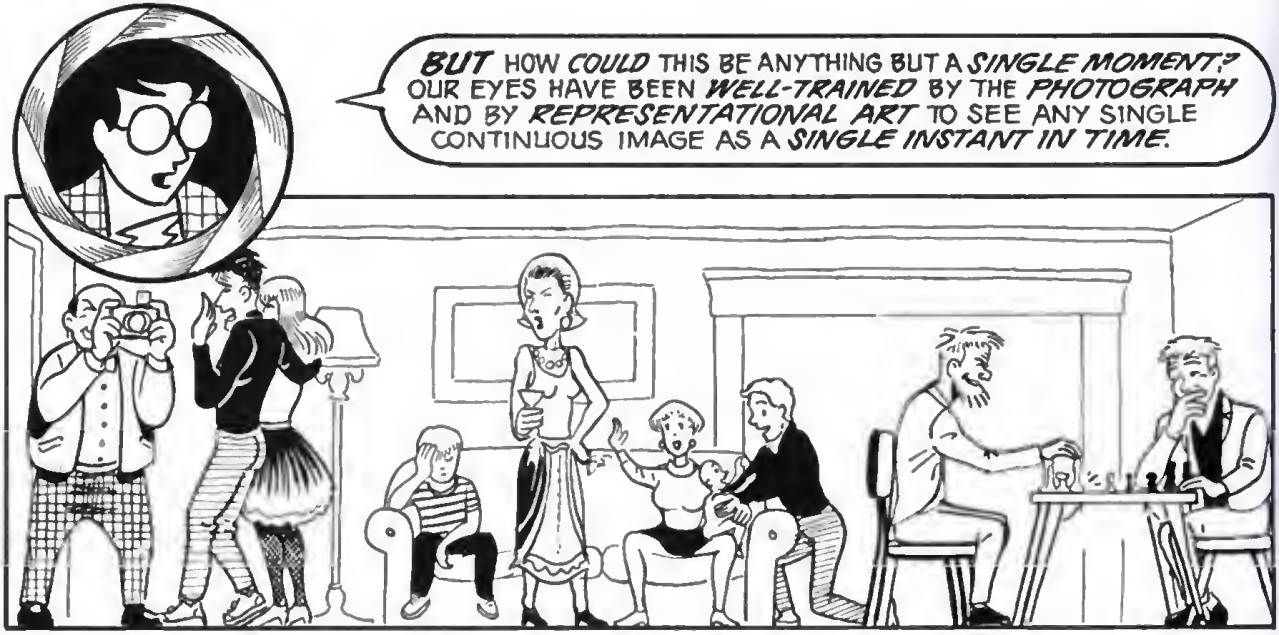

SINGLE MOMENT?
HARDLY!
WHIRRRRRR


EVEN THE BRIEF SOUND OF A FLASH-BULB HAS A CERTAIN DURATION, SHORT TO BE SURE, BUT NOT INSTANTANEOUS!
PAF!


FAR SLOWER IS THE DURATION OF THE AVERAGE WORD. UNCLE HENRY ALONE BURNS UP A GOOD SECOND IN THIS PANEL, ESPECIALLY SINCE "SMILE!" UNDOUBTEDLY PRECEDED THE FLASH.
SMILE!
PAF!


LIKEWISE, THE NEXT BALLOONS COULD HAVE ONLY FOLLOWED THE BURST OF THE FLASHBULB, THUS ADDING STILL MORE TIME.
AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING, UNCLE HENRY!
HEE-HEE!


JUST AS PICTURES AND THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THEM CREATE THE ILLUSION OF TIME THROUGH CLOSURE, WORDS INTRODUCE TIME BY REPRESENTING THAT WHICH CAN ONLY EXIST IN TIME -- SOUND.
WITH ALL ITS ACTIONS AND REACTIONS, A PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD LAST A GOOD HALF MINUTE OR SO.

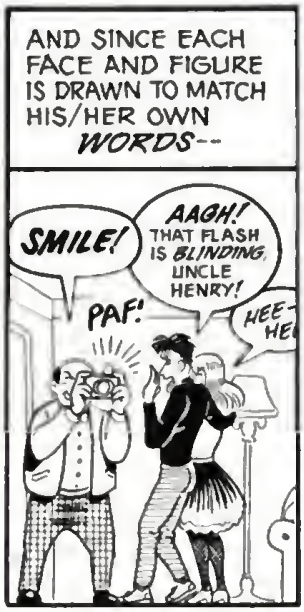

BUT HOW COULD THIS BE ANYTHING BUT A SINGLE MOMENT? OUR EYES HAVE BEEN WELL-TRAINED BY THE PHOTOGRAPH AND BY REPRESENTATIONAL ART TO SEE ANY SINGLE CONTINUOUS IMAGE AS A SINGLE INSTANT IN TIME.


BUT THE ACTIONS THAT WE SEE OCCURRING SEEMINGLY AT THE SAME TIME OBVIOUSLY CAN'T BE!


ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT IT: LET'S THINK OF TIME AS A ROPE.


EACH INCH REPRESENTS A SECOND.


SUCH A ROPE MIGHT BE SAID TO WIND SOMETHING LIKE THIS THROUGH OUR PANEL.
SIMPLIFIED OF COURSE, SINCE EACH BALLOON HAS ITS OWN TWISTS AND TURNS.


AND SINCE EACH FACE AND FIGURE IS DRAWN TO MATCH HIS/HER OWN WORDS--
SMILE!
AAGH! THAT FLASH IS BLINDING UNCLE HENRY!
PAF!
HEE-

--THOSE FIGURES, FACES AND WORDS ARE MATCHED IN *TIME* AS WELL.

THE PROPERTIES OF THE SINGLE CONTINUOUS ***IMAGE***, MEANWHILE, TEND TO MATCH EACH FIGURE WITH EVERY ***OTHER*** FIGURE.

SINGLE *IMAGE.*

SINGLE *MOMENT.*

PORTRAYING TIME ON A LINE MOVING ***LEFT TO RIGHT,*** THIS PUTS ALL THE *IMAGES* ON THE SAME VERTICAL AXIS.

AND ***TANGLES UP TIME*** BEYOND *ALL RECOGNITION!*

SNAP!

SNAP!

CRASH!

PERHAPS WE'VE BEEN TOO CONDITIONED BY PHOTOGRAPHY TO PERCEIVE SINGLE IMAGES AS *SINGLE MOMENTS*. AFTER ALL, IT DOES TAKE AN EYE *TIME* TO MOVE ACROSS SCENES IN *REAL LIFE!*

EACH FIGURE IS ARRANGED FROM *LEFT TO RIGHT* IN THE SEQUENCE WE WILL *"READ"* THEM, EACH OCCUPYING A DISTINCT *TIME SLOT.*

IN SOME RESPECTS THIS PANEL BY ITSELF ACTUALLY *FITS* OUR *DEFINITION* OF COMICS! ALL IT NEEDS IS A FEW *GUTTERS* THROWN IN TO *CLARIFY THE SEQUENCE.*

SMILE!

PA

AAGH! THAT FLASH IS *BLINDING,* UNCLE HENRY!

HEE-HEE!

OH, *HENRY!* PUT THAT CAMERA *AWAY,* WILL YOU?

AWW, LET HIM *BE,* MOM HE'S JUST *HAVING FUN*

WELL, IF OL' HENRY IS GONNA HAVE MUCH *MORE* FUN, WE MAY HAFTA LOCK UP THE *WINE CELLAR*

CHECK!

HMMM...

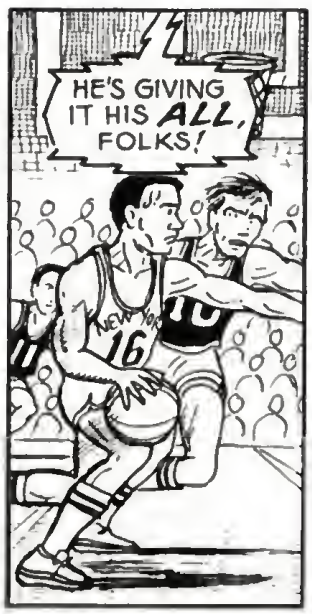
SURE YOU WANT TO MOVE *THERE,* JED?

HUMP!

ONE PANEL, OPERATING AS ***SEVERAL*** PANELS.




NOT *ALL* PANELS ARE LIKE THAT, OF COURSE.
A SILENT PANEL SUCH AS THIS COULD *INDEED* BE SAID TO DEPICT A *SINGLE MOMENT!*

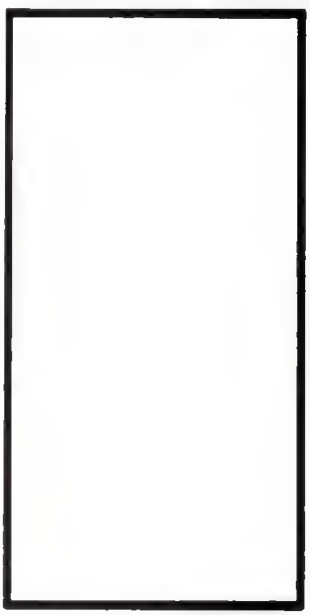

HE'S GIVING IT HIS *ALL*, FOLKS!


IF *SOUND* IS INTRODUCED, THIS CEASES TO BE TRUE--


--*BUT*, IN AN OTHERWISE SILENT *CAPTIONED* PANEL, THE SINGLE MOMENT CAN ACTUALLY BE *HELD*.


HE WAS GIVING IT HIS *ALL*, WHEN--

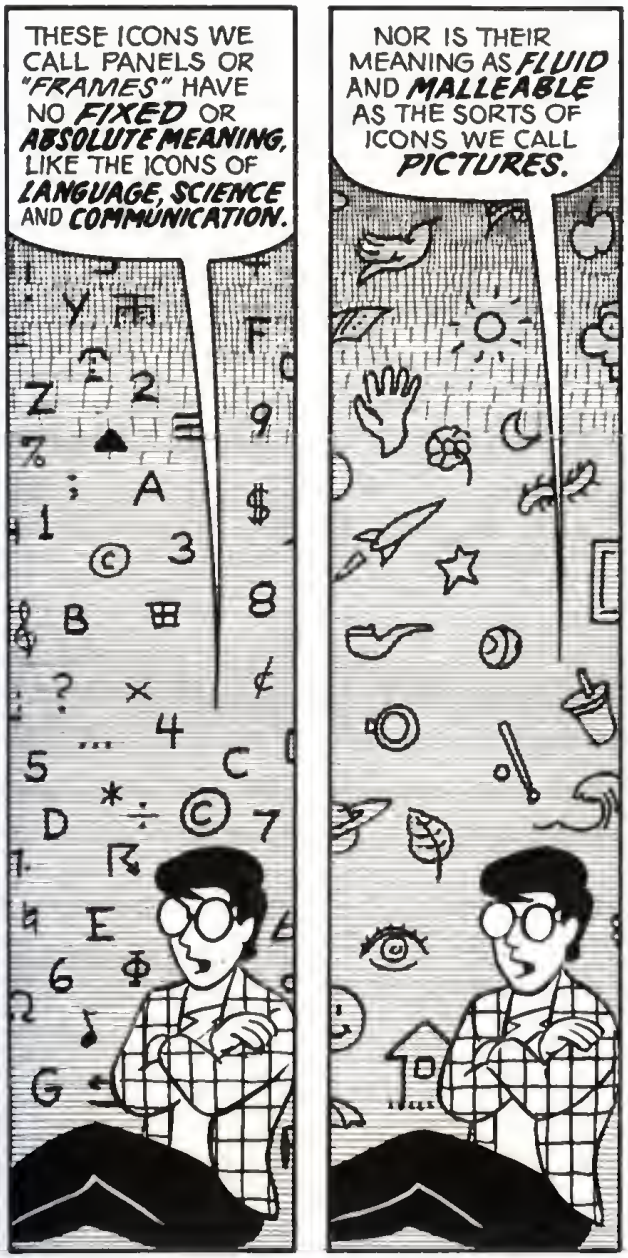

THESE VARIOUS SHAPES WE CALL *PANELS* HOLD IN THEIR BORDERS ALL OF THE ICONS THAT ADD UP TO THE *VOCABULARY OF COMICS*.



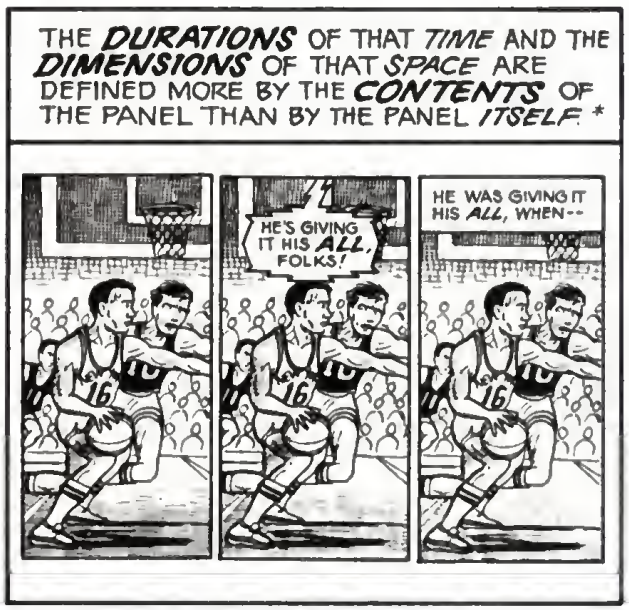

ALL EXCEPT *ONE*.

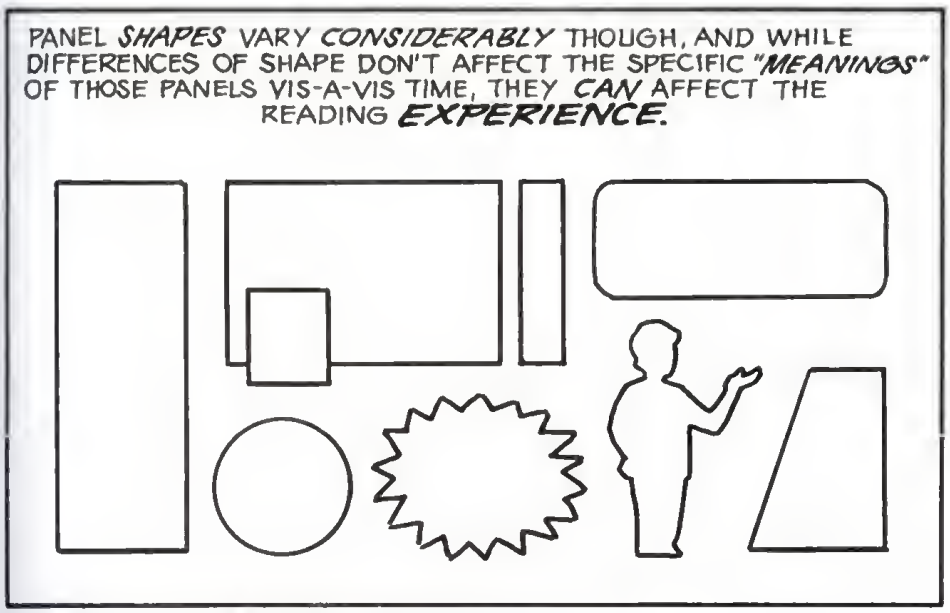

FOR JUST AS THE BODY'S LARGEST ORGAN --OUR *SKIN*-- IS SELDOM *THOUGHT OF* AS AN ORGAN--


--SO TOO IS THE PANEL *ITSELF* OVERLOOKED AS COMICS' MOST IMPORTANT *ICON!*



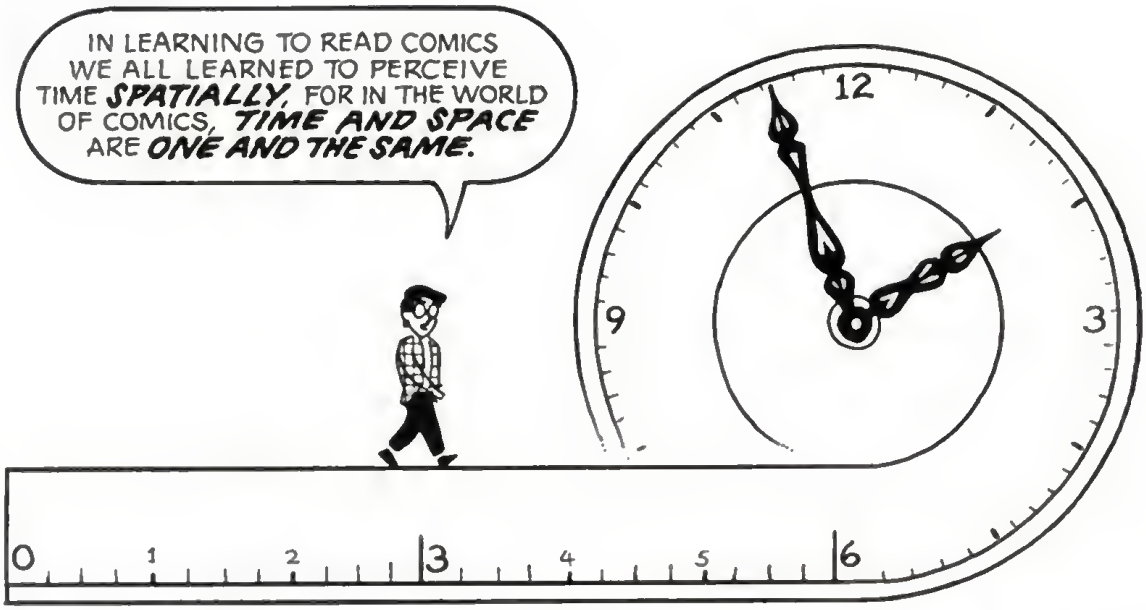




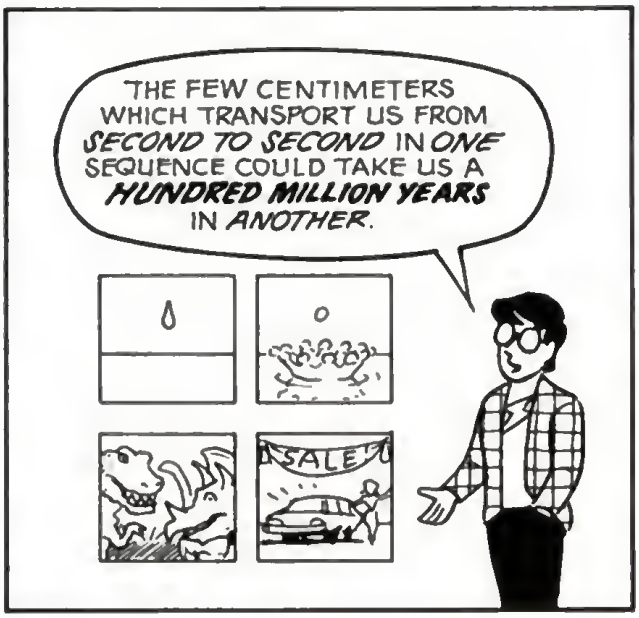




*EISNER DISCUSSES THIS UNDER THE HEADING "FRAMING TIME" IN COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART


IN LEARNING TO READ COMICS WE ALL LEARNED TO PERCEIVE TIME *SPATIALLY*, FOR IN THE WORLD OF COMICS, *TIME AND SPACE* ARE *ONE AND THE SAME.*
12
9
3
0
1
2
3
4
5
6

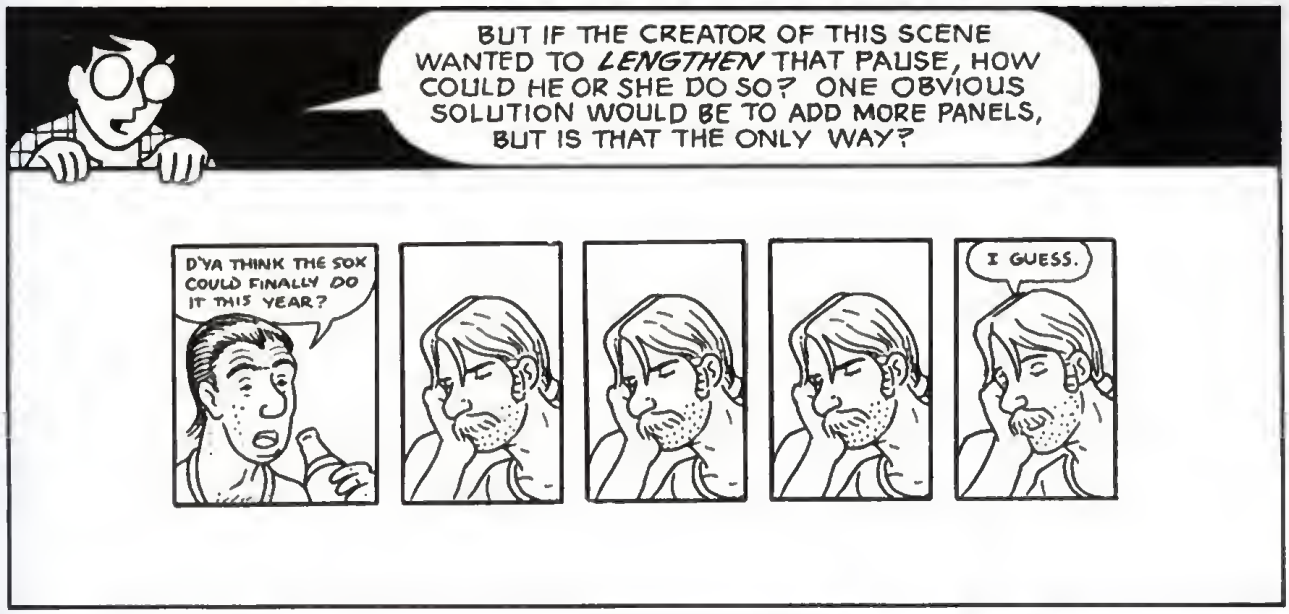

THE PROBLEM IS *THERE'S NO CONVERSION CHART!*


THE FEW CENTIMETERS WHICH TRANSPORT US FROM *SECOND TO SECOND* IN *ONE* SEQUENCE COULD TAKE US A *HUNDRED MILLION YEARS* IN *ANOTHER.*
SALE


SO, AS *READERS*, WE'RE LEFT WITH ONLY A *VAGUE SENSE* THAT AS OUR EYES ARE MOVING THROUGH *SPACE*, THEY'RE ALSO MOVING THROUGH *TIME*--WE JUST DON'T KNOW BY *HOW MUCH!*

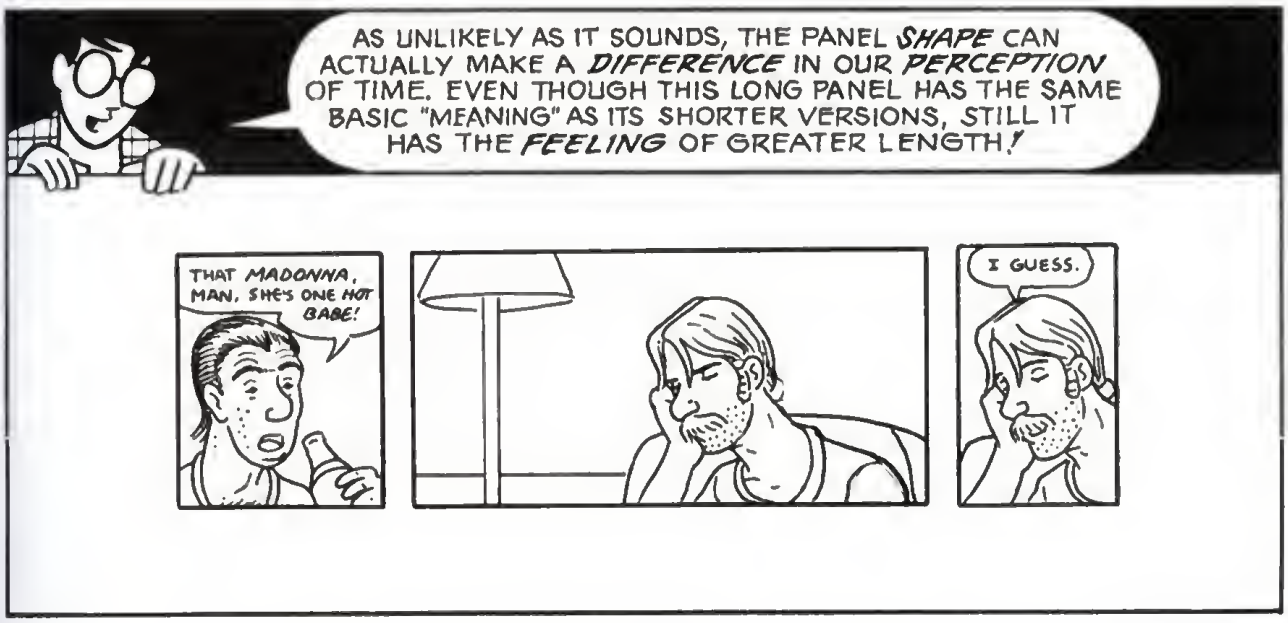

IN MOST CASES IT'S NOT HARD TO MAKE AN EDUCATED GUESS AS TO THE DURATION OF A GIVEN SEQUENCE, SO LONG AS THE *ELEMENTS* OF THAT SEQUENCE ARE *FAMILIAR* TO US.
I ALWAYS FIGURED MARY-ANNE WOULD GO FOR GILLIGAN.
I GUESS.

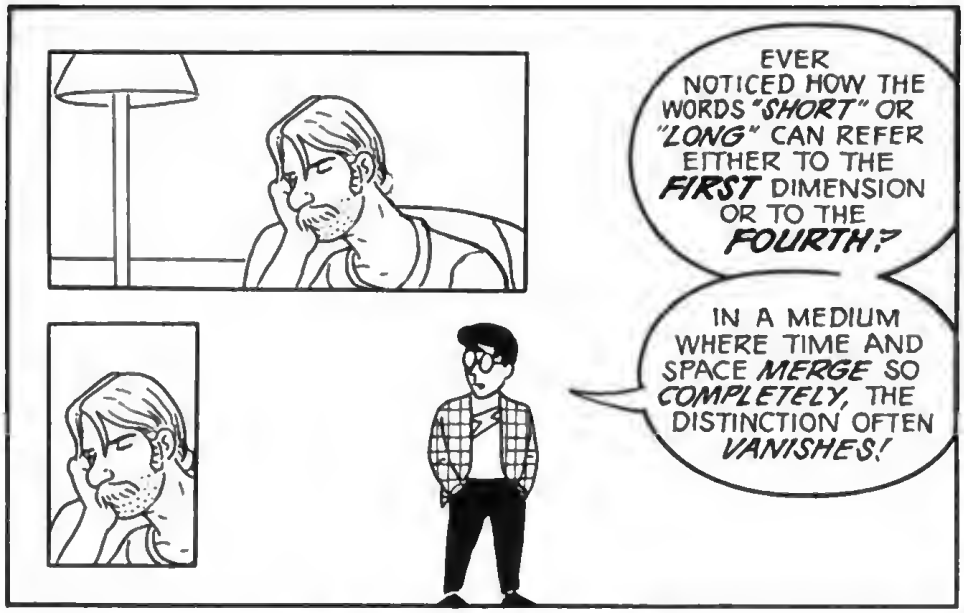

FROM A *LIFETIME OF CONVERSATIONS*, WE CAN BE SURE THAT A *"PAUSE"* PANEL LIKE THIS LASTS FOR NO MORE THAN SEVERAL *SECONDS.*


BUT IF THE CREATOR OF THIS SCENE WANTED TO *LENGTHEN* THAT PAUSE, HOW COULD HE OR SHE DO SO? ONE OBVIOUS SOLUTION WOULD BE TO ADD MORE PANELS, BUT IS THAT THE ONLY WAY?
D'YA THINK THE SOX COULD FINALLY DO IT THIS YEAR?
I GUESS.

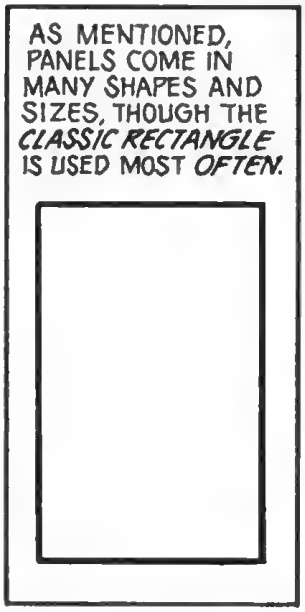

IS THERE ANY WAY TO MAKE A SINGLE SILENT PANEL LIKE THIS ONE SEEM *LONGER*? HOW ABOUT WIDENING THE SPACE *BETWEEN PANELS*? ANY *DIFFERENCE*?
HEY, I *DESERVE* A BETTER JOB! I COULD BE A *BRAIN SURGEON*!
I GUESS.


WE'VE SEEN HOW TIME CAN BE CONTROLLED THROUGH THE *CONTENT* OF PANELS, THE *NUMBER* OF PANELS AND CLOSURE *BETWEEN* PANELS, BUT THERE'S STILL *ONE MORE*.


AS UNLIKELY AS IT SOUNDS, THE PANEL *SHAPE* CAN ACTUALLY MAKE A *DIFFERENCE* IN OUR *PERCEPTION* OF TIME. EVEN THOUGH THIS LONG PANEL HAS THE SAME BASIC "MEANING" AS ITS SHORTER VERSIONS, STILL IT HAS THE *FEELING* OF GREATER LENGTH!
THAT *MADONNA*, MAN, SHE'S ONE *HOT* BABE!
I GUESS.

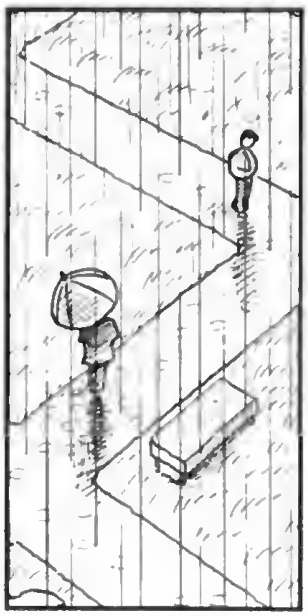

EVER NOTICED HOW THE WORDS "SHORT" OR "LONG" CAN REFER EITHER TO THE FIRST DIMENSION OR TO THE FOURTH?
IN A MEDIUM WHERE TIME AND SPACE MERGE SO COMPLETELY, THE DISTINCTION OFTEN VANISHES!


THE PANEL BORDER IS OUR GUIDE THROUGH TIME AND SPACE, BUT IT WILL ONLY GUIDE US SO FAR.


AS MENTIONED, PANELS COME IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES, THOUGH THE CLASSIC RECTANGLE IS USED MOST OFTEN.


MOST OF US ARE SO USED TO THE STANDARD RECTANGULAR FORMAT THAT A "BORDERLESS" PANEL SUCH AS THIS CAN TAKE ON A TIMELESS QUALITY.
HEY, ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME?!
I GUESS.

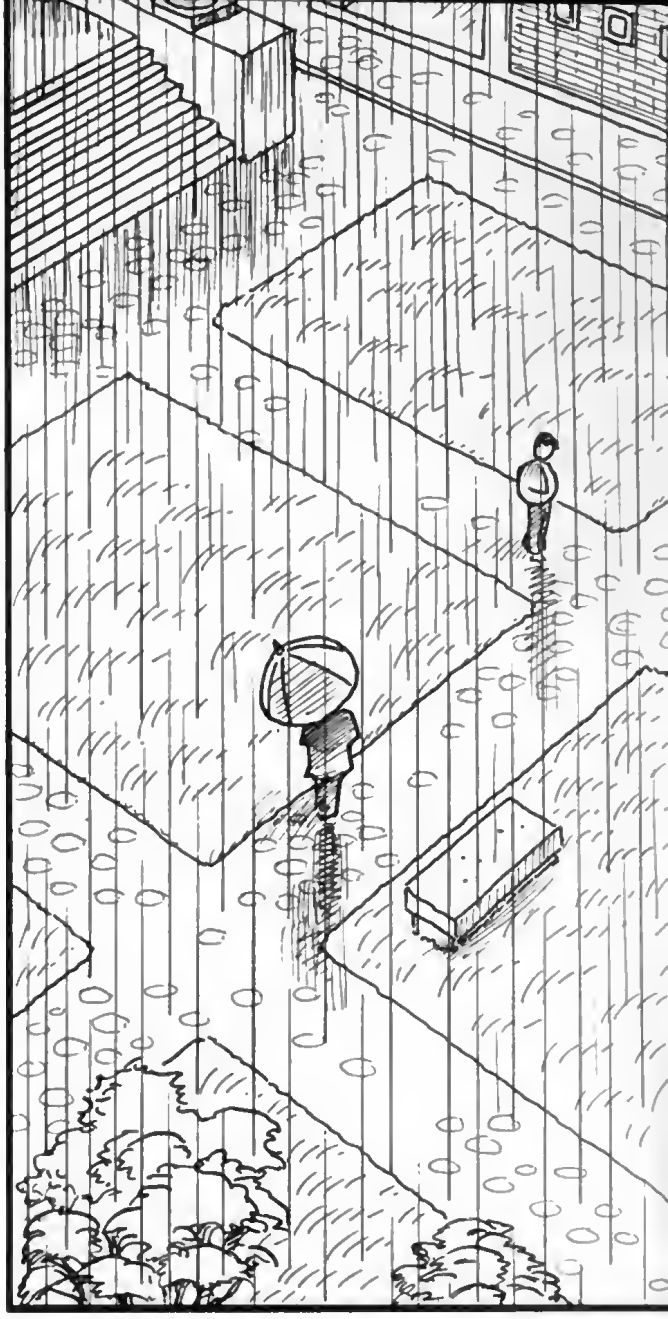

WHEN THE CONTENT OF A SILENT PANEL OFFERS NO CLUES AS TO ITS DURATION, IT CAN ALSO PRODUCE A SENSE OF TIMELESSNESS.

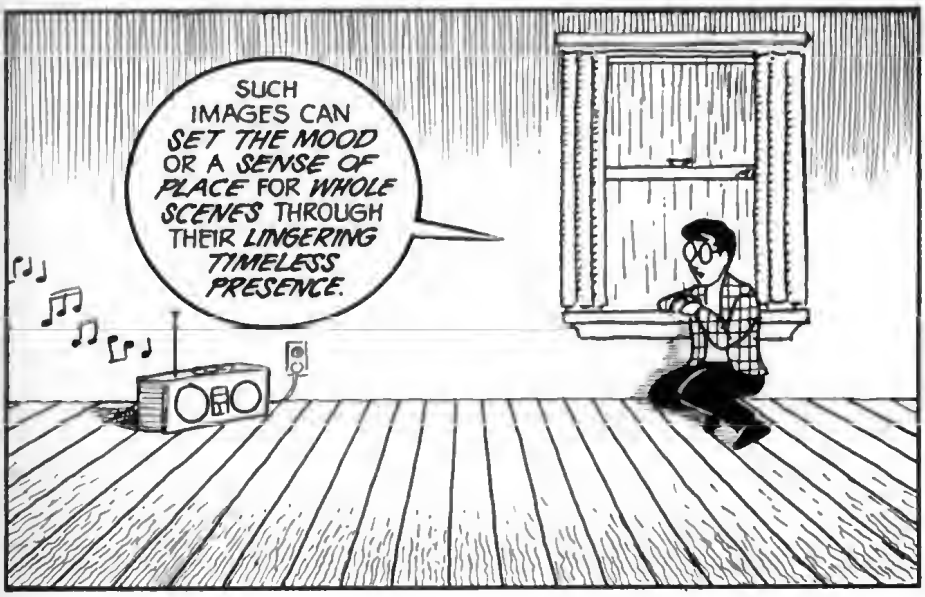



BECAUSE OF ITS UNRESOLVED NATURE, SUCH A PANEL MAY LINGER IN THE READER'S MIND.


AND ITS PRESENCE MAY BE FELT IN THE PANELS WHICH FOLLOW IT.


WHEN "BLEEDS" ARE USED -- I.E., WHEN A PANEL RUNS OFF THE EDGE OF THE PAGE -- THIS EFFECT IS COMPOUNDED.
TIME IS NO LONGER CONTAINED BY THE FAMILIAR ICON OF THE CLOSED PANEL, BUT INSTEAD HEMORRHAGES AND ESCAPES INTO TIMELESS SPACE.




SUCH IMAGES CAN SET THE MOOD OR A SENSE OF PLACE FOR WHOLE SCENES THROUGH THEIR LINGERING TIMELESS PRESENCE.


ONCE AGAIN, THIS IS A TECHNIQUE USED MOST OFTEN IN JAPAN AND ONLY RECENTLY ADOPTED HERE IN THE WEST.

IN COMICS, AS IN *FILM*, *TELEVISION* AND *"REAL LIFE"*, IT IS ALWAYS ***NOW.***

THIS PANEL AND *THIS* PANEL ***ALONE*** REPRESENTS THE ***PRESENT.***

ANY PANEL ***BEFORE*** THIS--THAT ***LAST*** ONE, FOR INSTANCE--REPRESENTS THE ***PAST.***

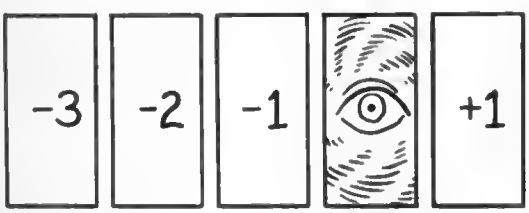
LIKEWISE, ALL PANELS *STILL TO COME*--THIS ***NEXT*** PANEL, FOR INSTANCE--REPRESENT THE ***FUTURE.***

BUT *UNLIKE* OTHER MEDIA, IN COMICS, THE PAST IS MORE THAN JUST *MEMORIES* FOR THE AUDIENCE AND THE FUTURE IS MORE THAN JUST *POSSIBILITIES!*

BOTH *PAST* AND *FUTURE* ARE *REAL* AND *VISIBLE* AND ***ALL AROUND US!***

WHEREVER YOUR EYES ARE FOCUSED, THAT'S ***NOW.*** BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOUR EYES TAKE IN THE *SURROUNDING LANDSCAPE* OF *PAST AND FUTURE!*

LIKE A *STORM FRONT*, THE EYE MOVES OVER THE COMICS PAGE, PUSHING THE WARM, HIGH-PRESSURE ***FUTURE*** AHEAD OF IT, LEAVING THE COOL, LOW-PRESSURE ***PAST*** IN ITS WAKE.

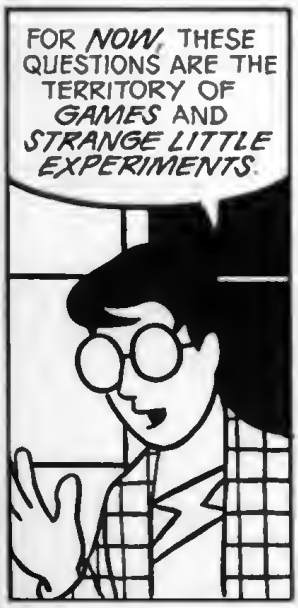


WHEREVER THE EYE HITS *LAND*, WE EXPECT IT TO BEGIN MOVING *FORWARD.*

BUT *EYES*, LIKE *STORMS*, CAN *CHANGE DIRECTION!*


ONE BEER WON'T HURT.
GLUG! GLUG! BUD
CRASH!
R.I.P. CARL
END
HMM...
THE IDEA THAT THE READER MIGHT CHOOSE A DIRECTION IS STILL CONSIDERED EXOTIC.
I WANT TO RENT A VIDEO.
SORRY, ALL OUR VIDEOS ARE IN BORNEO.
YET WE SELDOM DO CHANGE DIRECTION, EXCEPT TO RE-READ OR REVIEW PASSAGES. IT'S LEFT-TO-RIGHT, UP-TO-DOWN, PAGE AFTER PAGE.
NAH, I BETTER NOT.
I'LL JUST GO HOME NOW.
HI, MOM, I'M HOME!
IT'S A NOTE!
Dear Carl, I've gone to Borneo -Mom
BORNEO?!
I'LL JUST DRIVE AROUND A WHILE.
OH MY GOD! I'M IN THE WRONG HOUSE!
JUST KIDDING. WHAT CAN I GET YOU?
HMM... A FORK. TO THE RIGHT IS THE VIDEO STORE.
VIDEO
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
GOSH, I JUST WANTED TO RENT ANOTHER VIDEO.
O.K
DO YOU HAVE CARNIVAL OF SOULS?
NAAH! I'LL GO LEFT.
OH, HI, MR. GORDON!
CARL?
NO.
THIS MAY, IN PART, BE THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER MEDIA LIKE FILM AND TELEVISION WHERE VIEWER CHOICE HAS NOT GENERALLY BEEN FEASIBLE.
CONDITIONED AS WE ARE TO READ LEFT-TO-RIGHT AND UP-TO-DOWN, A MISCHIEVOUS CARTOONIST CAN PLAY ANY NUMBER OF TRICKS ON US.
THE INCREDIBLE MR. SPOT
©1992 Matt Feazell
THE END OF THE MONTH...
BROKE AGAIN!
I'LL JUST BORROW SOME MONEY FROM MYSELF IN THE FUTURE!
NOW I CAN GO OUT TO DINNER!
EAT
MY COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEF, ANDRE! THE CHECK, PLEASE.
OUI, M'SIEU.
HEY!

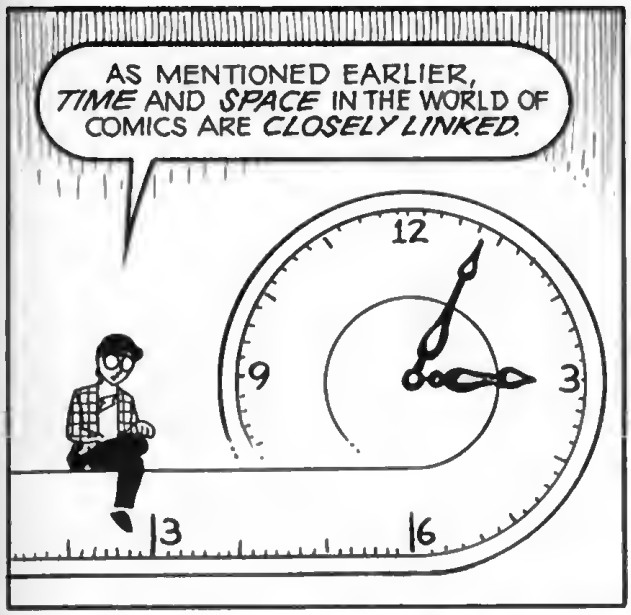

COMICS READERS ARE ALSO CONDITIONED BY OTHER MEDIA AND THE *"REAL TIME"* OF EVERYDAY LIFE TO EXPECT A VERY *LINEAR PROGRESSION.* JUST A *STRAIGHT LINE* FROM *POINT A* TO *POINT B.* BUT IS THAT *NECESSARY?*
?
?
WAAH!
SLAP!
KICK
1492!
GRR!
BOOM!
SLAM!

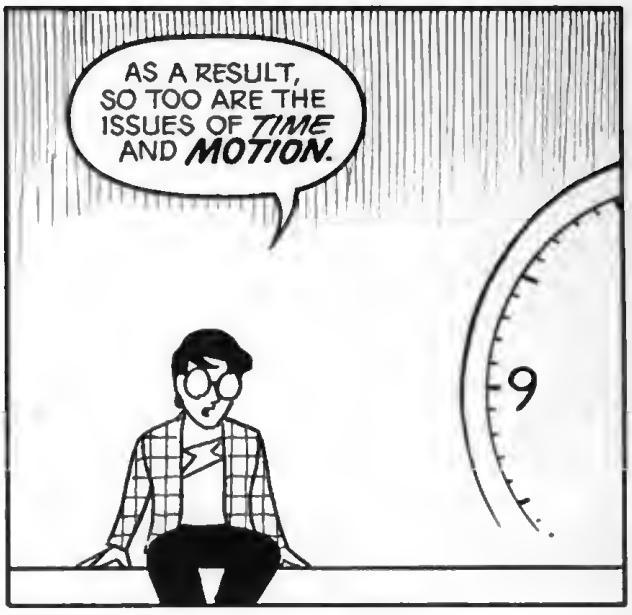

FOR *NOW,* THESE QUESTIONS ARE THE TERRITORY OF *GAMES* AND *STRANGE LITTLE EXPERIMENTS.*

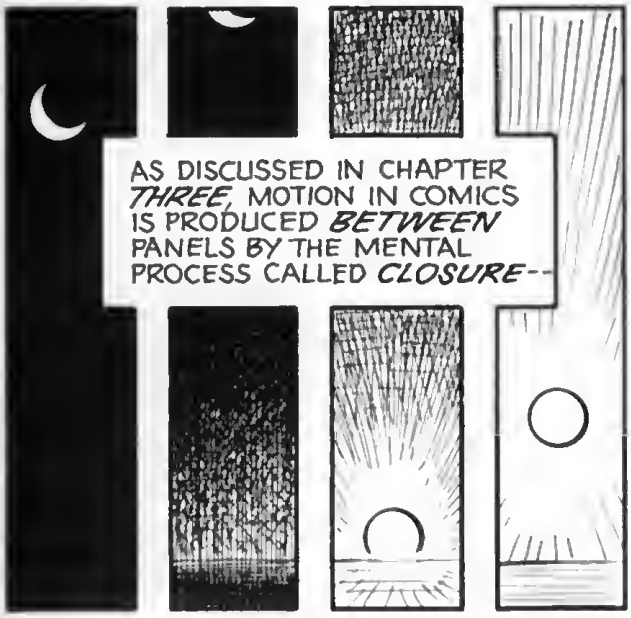

BUT *VIEWER PARTICIPATION* IS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING AN *ENORMOUS ISSUE* IN *OTHER MEDIA.*

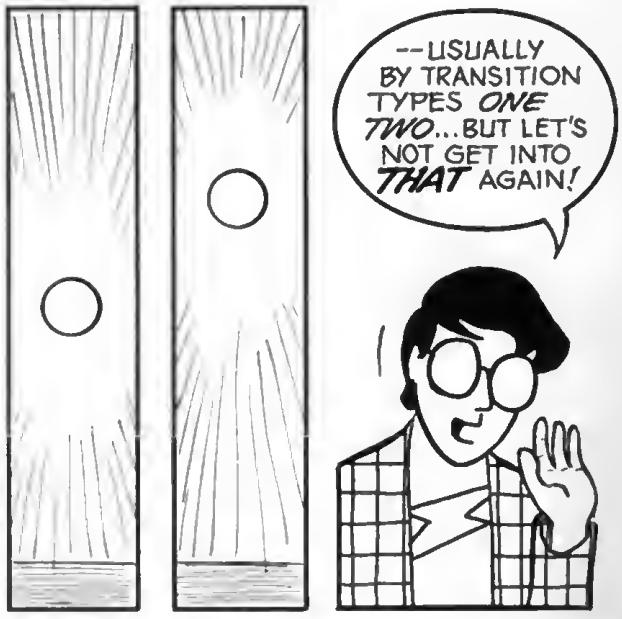

HOW COMICS *ADDRESSES* THIS ISSUE--OR *FAILS* TO--COULD PLAY A CRUCIAL PART IN *DEFINING* THE ROLE OF COMICS IN THE *NEW CENTURY.*


TIME WILL TELL.
1970
1980
2000


AS MENTIONED EARLIER, TIME AND SPACE IN THE WORLD OF COMICS ARE CLOSELY LINKED.
12
9
3
13
16

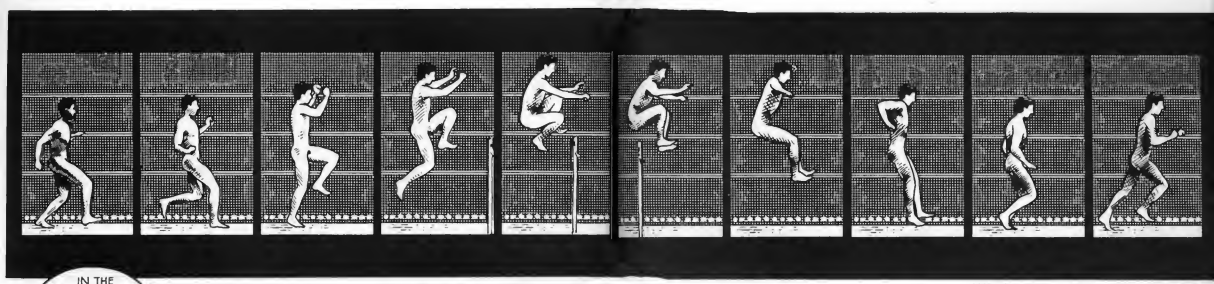

AS A RESULT, SO TOO ARE THE ISSUES OF TIME AND MOTION.
9


AS DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER THREE, MOTION IN COMICS IS PRODUCED BETWEEN PANELS BY THE MENTAL PROCESS CALLED CLOSURE--


--USUALLY BY TRANSITION TYPES ONE TWO...BUT LET'S NOT GET INTO THAT AGAIN!


DESPITE COMICS' THREE THOUSAND YEAR HISTORY, IT WASN'T UNTIL TÖPFFER'S MID-1800's DOODLINGS THAT SPECIFIC MOTIONS WERE PORTRAYED IN COMICS IN THE NOW-FAMILIAR PANEL-TO-PANEL FORM.
HOW, IN BRIGHT AND WITTY SOCIETY, ONE SHOULD BE SEATED IN ORDER TO TALK THEATRES, CASINOS, AND THE LATEST NON-SENSE IN GENERAL.
HOW, IF A SUPERIOR MAKES A JOKE, ONE JUMPS UP WITH A ROAR OF LAUGHTER


WITHIN A FEW YEARS, HOWEVER, MOTION WAS A HOT TOPIC INDEED!



COPIED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE

IN THE LAST QUARTER OF THE *NINETEENTH CENTURY* IT SEEMED LIKE *EVERYONE* WAS TRYING TO CAPTURE MOTION THROUGH *SCIENCE!*

BY *1880*, INVENTORS THE *WORLD OVER* KNEW THAT *"MOVING PICTURES"* WERE JUST AROUND THE CORNER. *EVERYONE* WANTED TO BE *FIRST!*

MY *STROBOSCOPE* IS *SUPERIOR IN EVERY WAY* TO THE OBSOLETE *ZOETROPE!*

BAH! MY *PRAXINOSCOPE* IS BETTER!

FOOLS! MY *KINEMATOSCOPE* WILL SHOW YOU!

HA! CHILD'S PLAY! THEY ARE BUT *MERE TOYS* NEXT TO THE AWESOME *PHANTASMATROPE!*

FRAUDS *ALL!* MY *ZOÖPRAXINOSCOPE* WILL--!

EVENTUALLY *THOMAS EDISON*, THAT OLD SCALLYWAG, FILED THE FIRST *PATENT* ON A PROCESS USING STRIPS OF *CLEAR PLASTIC PHOTOS* AND *FILM* WAS *OFF AND RUNNING!*

IF YOU'RE GOING TO PAINT A WORLD--

--FILLED WITH MOTION--

--THEN BE PREPARED TO *PAINT MOTION!*

DUCHAMP, MORE CONCERNED WITH THE *IDEA* OF MOTION THAN THE *SENSATION*, WOULD EVENTUALLY REDUCE SUCH CONCEPTS AS MOTION TO A *SINGLE LINE.*

AS THE *MOVING PICTURE* BEGAN ITS SPECTACULAR RISE, A FEW OF THE MORE RADICAL *PAINTERS* OF THE DAY EXPLORED THE IDEA THAT MOTION COULD BE DEPICTED BY A *SINGLE* IMAGE ON *CANVAS.*

THE FUTURISTS IN ITALY AND *MARCEL DUCHAMP* IN FRANCE BEGAN THE *SYSTEMATIC DECOMPOSITION OF MOVING IMAGES* IN A *STATIC MEDIUM.*

Girl Running on a Balcony by Balla

Nude Descending a Staircase #2 by Duchamp

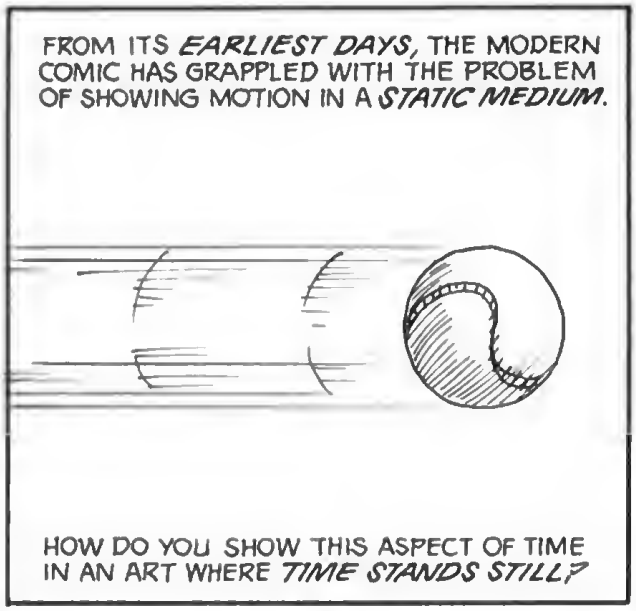
IT WASN'T A BAD IDEA!

DUCHAMP SOON MOVED ON, THE FUTURISTS *DISBANDED* AND FINE ARTISTS GENERALLY *LOST INTEREST* IN THIS *OTHER* TYPE OF *"MOVING PICTURE."*

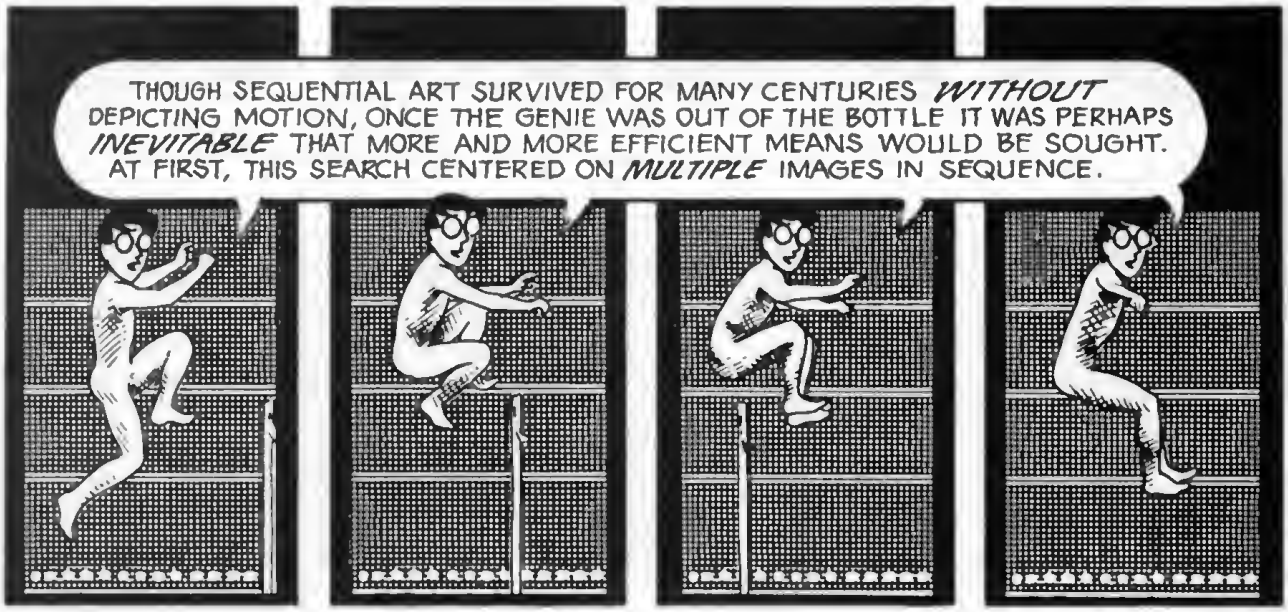
BUT THROUGHOUT THIS SAME PERIOD *ANOTHER* MEDIUM, LESS *CONSPICUOUSLY*, HAD BEEN INVESTIGATING THIS SAME AREA.

I'M SURE YOU CAN ALL GUESS WHICH MEDIUM I MEAN!


WAK!

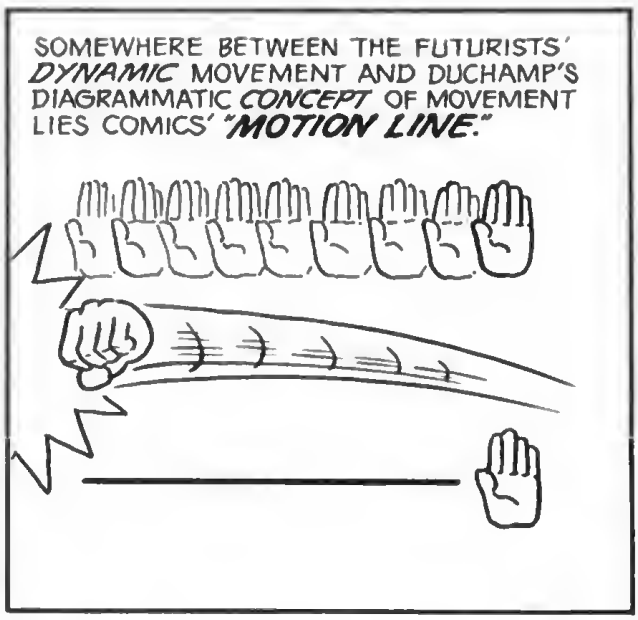

FROM ITS *EARLIEST DAYS*, THE MODERN COMIC HAS GRAPPLED WITH THE PROBLEM OF SHOWING MOTION IN A *STATIC MEDIUM*.
HOW DO YOU SHOW THIS ASPECT OF TIME IN AN ART WHERE *TIME STANDS STILL?*


AND IN COMICS, UNLIKE PAINTING, IT WAS MORE THAN JUST A *THEORETICAL QUESTION!*
SMASH!


THOUGH SEQUENTIAL ART SURVIVED FOR MANY CENTURIES *WITHOUT* DEPICTING MOTION, ONCE THE GENIE WAS OUT OF THE BOTTLE IT WAS PERHAPS *INEVITABLE* THAT MORE AND MORE EFFICIENT MEANS WOULD BE SOUGHT. AT FIRST, THIS SEARCH CENTERED ON *MULTIPLE* IMAGES IN SEQUENCE.


BUT JUST AS A SINGLE PANEL CAN REPRESENT A *SPAN* OF TIME THROUGH *SOUND*--
SMILE!
PAF!


--SO TOO CAN A SINGLE PANEL REPRESENT A SPAN OF TIME THROUGH *PICTURES!*

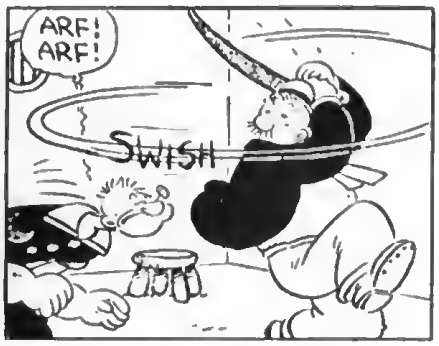

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE FUTURISTS' *DYNAMIC* MOVEMENT AND DUCHAMP'S DIAGRAMMATIC *CONCEPT* OF MOVEMENT LIES COMICS' *"MOTION LINE."*

IN THE BEGINNING, MOTION LINES--OR *"ZIP-RIBBONS"* AS SOME CALL THEM--WERE *WILD, MESSY,* ALMOST ***DESPERATE*** ATTEMPTS TO REPRESENT THE PATHS OF *MOVING OBJECTS* THROUGH *SPACE.*



"POPEYE" AND "BRAGGO THE MONK" © KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, INC.

OVER THE YEARS, THESE LINES BECAME MORE *REFINED* AND *STYLIZED,* EVEN ***DIAGRAMMATIC.***



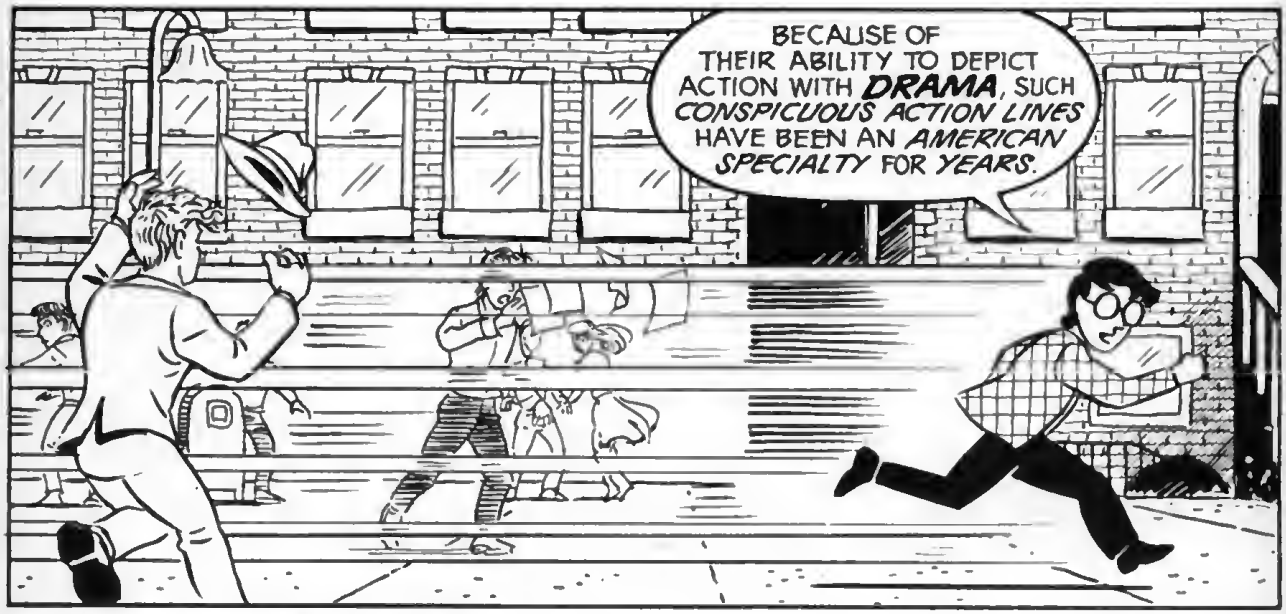
EVENTUALLY, IN THE HANDS OF *HEROIC FANTASY* ARTISTS LIKE ***BILL EVERETT*** AND ***JACK KIRBY***--

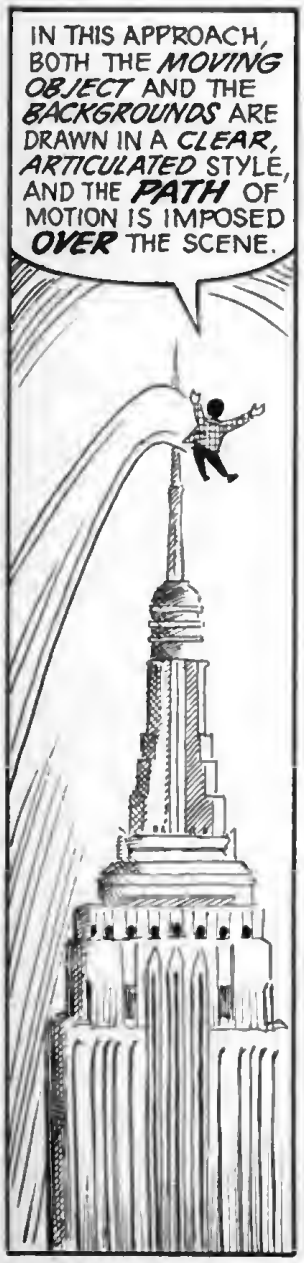


--THOSE SAME LINES BECAME ***SO*** STYLIZED AS TO ALMOST HAVE A *LIFE* AND *PHYSICAL PRESENCE* ***ALL THEIR OWN!***



ART (CENTER AND ABOVE RIGHT) © D.C. COMICS. (LEFT AND RIGHT) © MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP INC.

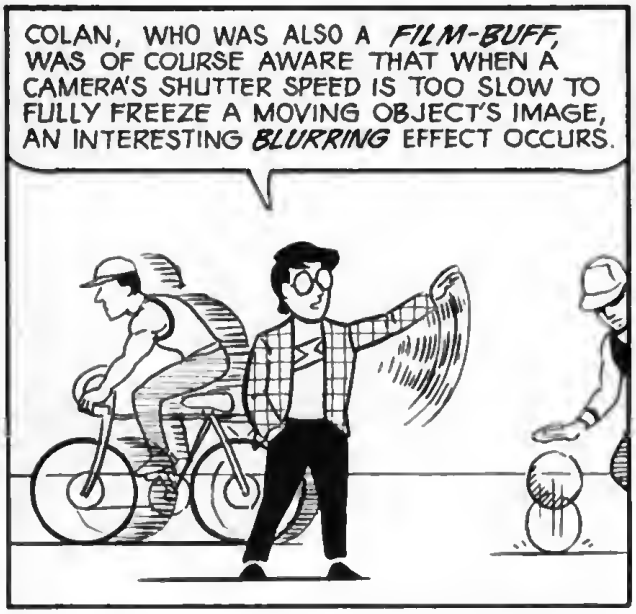


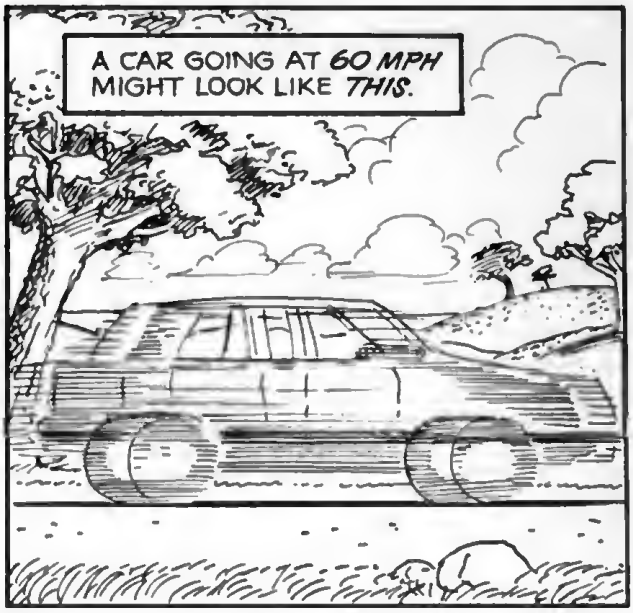


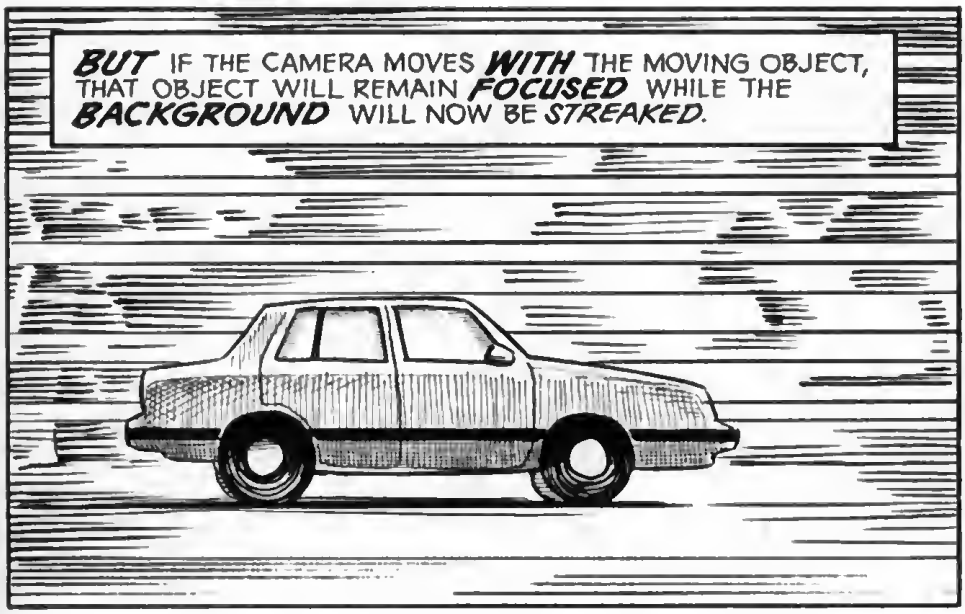




* MULTIPLE IMAGES CAN BE FOUND IN THE WORK OF KRIGSTEIN, INFANTINO AND OTHERS.

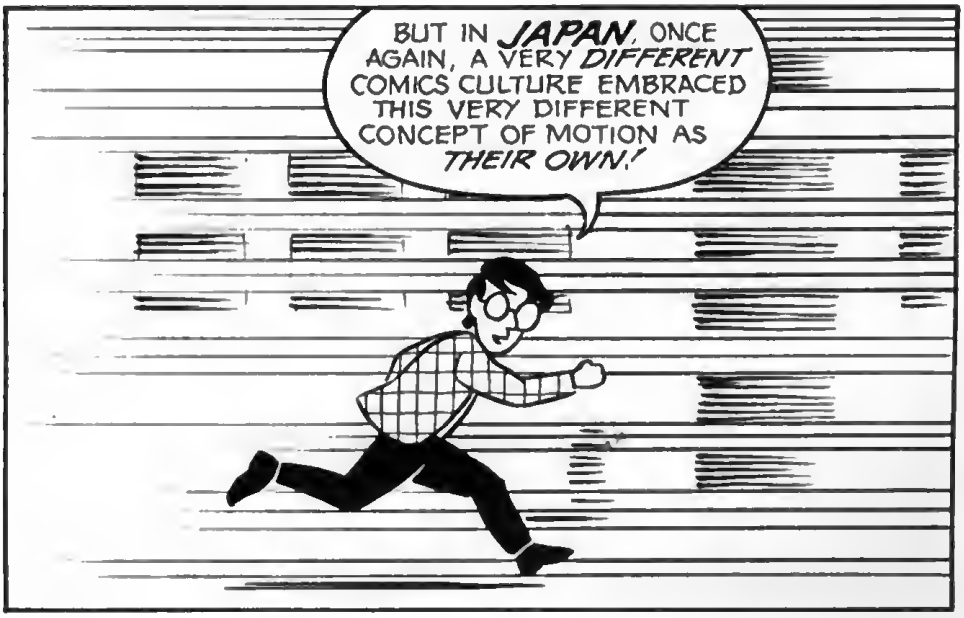

COLAN, WHO WAS ALSO A FILM-BUFF, WAS OF COURSE AWARE THAT WHEN A CAMERA'S SHUTTER SPEED IS TOO SLOW TO FULLY FREEZE A MOVING OBJECT'S IMAGE, AN INTERESTING BLURRING EFFECT OCCURS.


A CAR GOING AT 60 MPH MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS.


BUT IF THE CAMERA MOVES WITH THE MOVING OBJECT, THAT OBJECT WILL REMAIN FOCUSED WHILE THE BACKGROUND WILL NOW BE STREAKED.


AMERICAN COMICS ARTISTS TOOK LITTLE OR NO INTEREST IN THIS KIND OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TRICKERY.


AND IN EUROPE WHERE MOTION LINES WERE USED ONLY SPARINGLY, IT WAS LIKEWISE IGNORED.

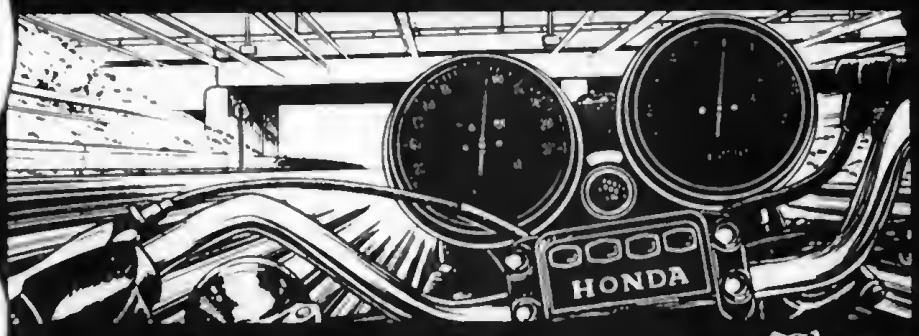

BUT IN JAPAN, ONCE AGAIN, A VERY DIFFERENT COMICS CULTURE EMBRACED THIS VERY DIFFERENT CONCEPT OF MOTION AS THEIR OWN!

"*SUBJECTIVE MOTION*," AS I CALL IT, OPERATES ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT IF *OBSERVING* A MOVING OBJECT *CAN* BE INVOLVING, *BEING* THAT OBJECT SHOULD BE *MORE* SO.

JAPANESE ARTISTS, STARTING IN THE LATE *60's*, BEGAN PUTTING THEIR READERS *"IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT"* WITH PANELS LIKE *THESE*.

AND STARTING IN THE *MID-EIGHTIES*, A FEW *AMERICAN* ARTISTS BEGAN TO ADOPT THE EFFECT IN THEIR OWN WORK, UNTIL BY THE EARLY *NINETIES* IT HAS BECOME FAIRLY COMMON.







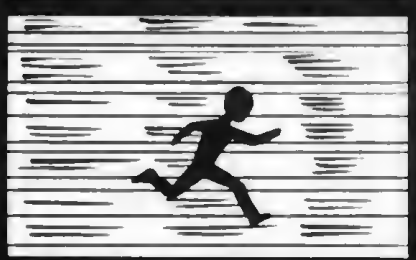


©石井いさみ?












IN A MEDIUM WHERE TIME AND SPACE *MERGE*--


--THE STORYTELLER HAS SOME UNUSUAL TOOLS AT HIS/HER DISPOSAL--

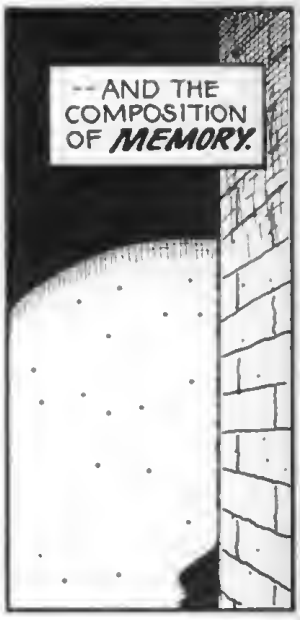

--SUCH AS THE *POLYPTYCH*, WHERE A MOVING FIGURE OR FIGURES--


--IS IMPOSED OVER A *CONTINUOUS BACKGROUND.*

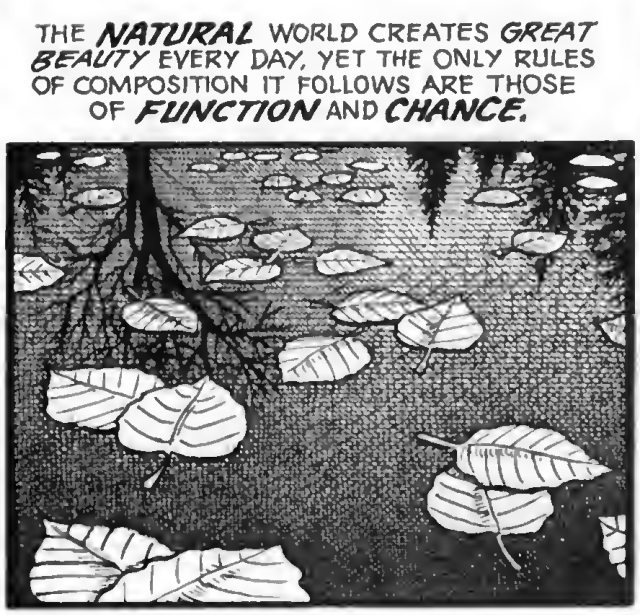

IN COMICS, *COMPOSITION* FOLLOWS A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF RULES THAN IN MOST *GRAPHIC ARTS.*


BY INTRODUCING *TIME* INTO THE EQUATION, COMICS ARTISTS ARE ARRANGING THE PAGE IN WAYS NOT ALWAYS CONDUCIVE TO TRADITIONAL PICTURE-MAKING.

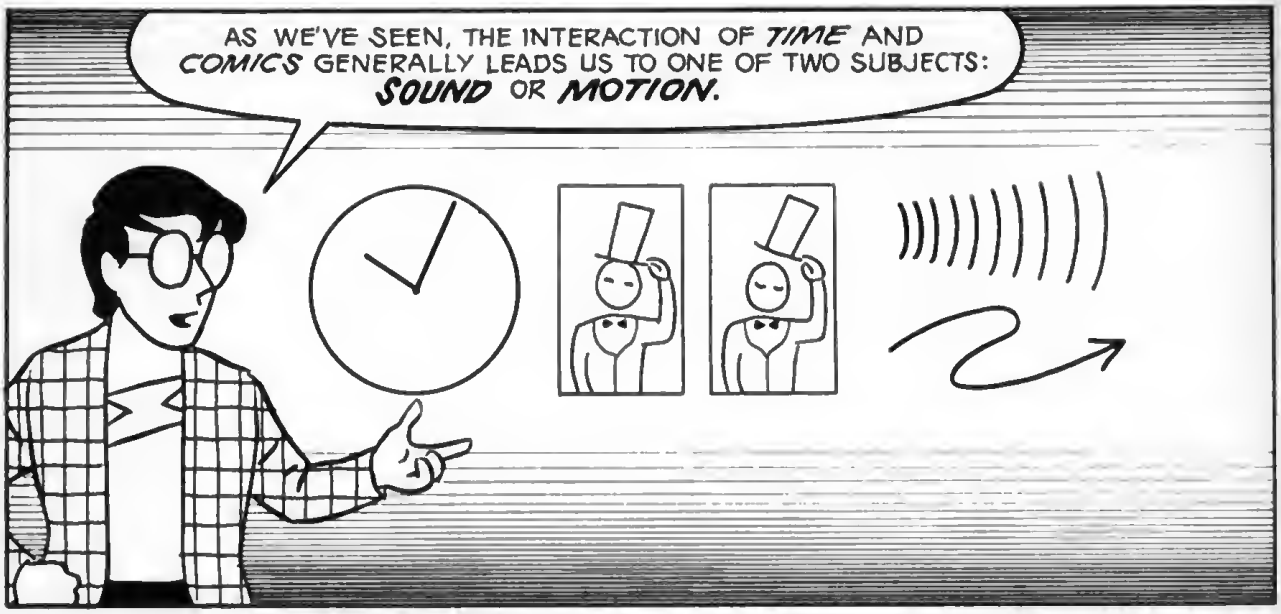

HERE, THE COMPOSITION OF THE *PICTURE* IS JOINED BY THE COMPOSITION OF *CHANGE*, THE COMPOSITION OF *DRAMA*--


--AND THE COMPOSITION OF *MEMORY.*

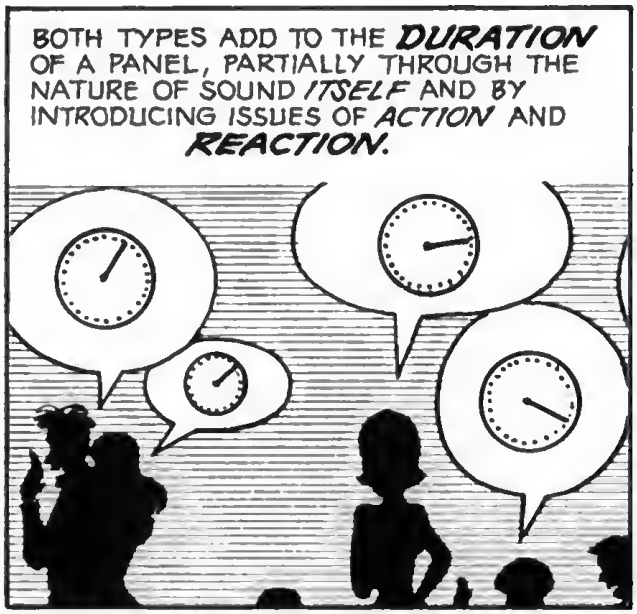

IF THE COMPOSITION OF A SINGLE PANEL IS TRULY *"PERFECT,"* DOESN'T THAT IMPLY THAT IT CAN--OR EVEN SHOULD--STAND *ALONE?*

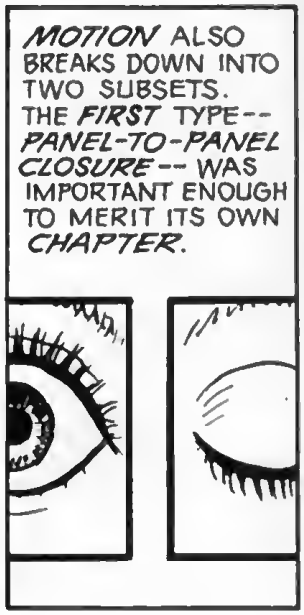

THE *NATURAL* WORLD CREATES *GREAT BEAUTY* EVERY DAY, YET THE ONLY RULES OF COMPOSITION IT FOLLOWS ARE THOSE OF *FUNCTION* AND *CHANCE.*

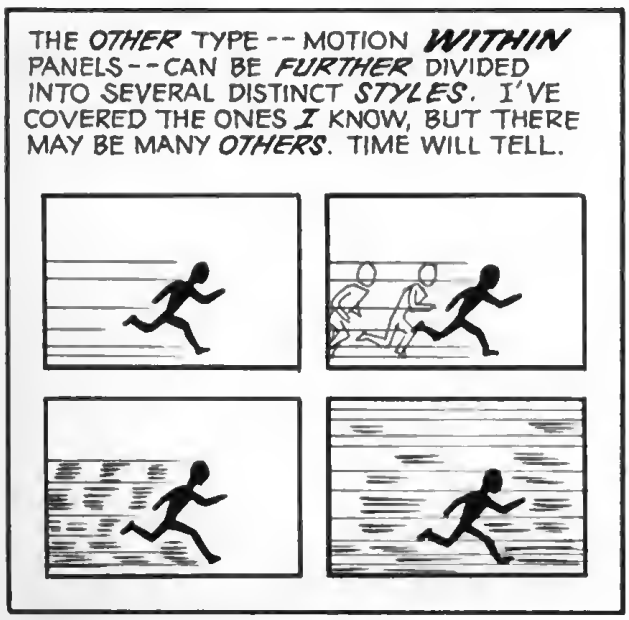

COMICS, AT ITS BEST, SHOULD DO NO LESS.

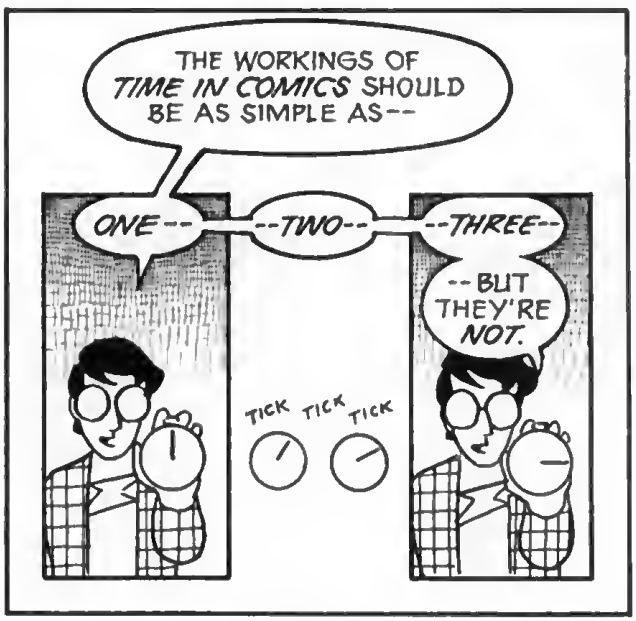

AS WE'VE SEEN, THE INTERACTION OF TIME AND COMICS GENERALLY LEADS US TO ONE OF TWO SUBJECTS: SOUND OR MOTION.

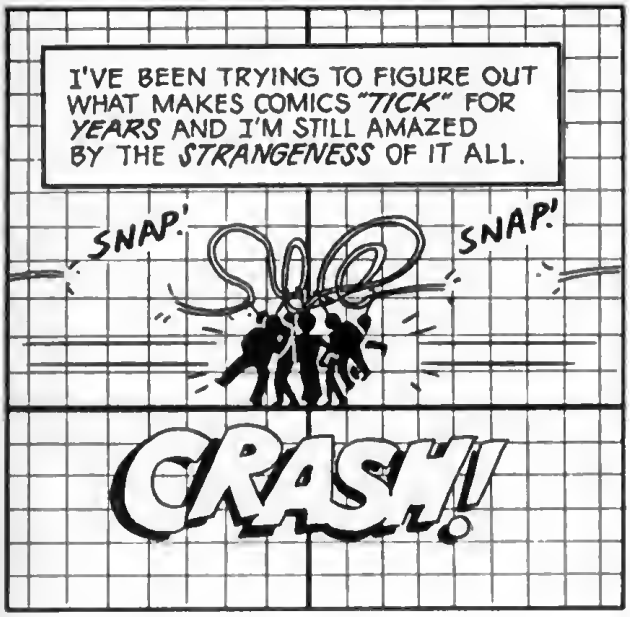

SOUND BREAKS DOWN INTO TWO SUBSETS: WORD BALLOONS AND SOUND EFFECTS.

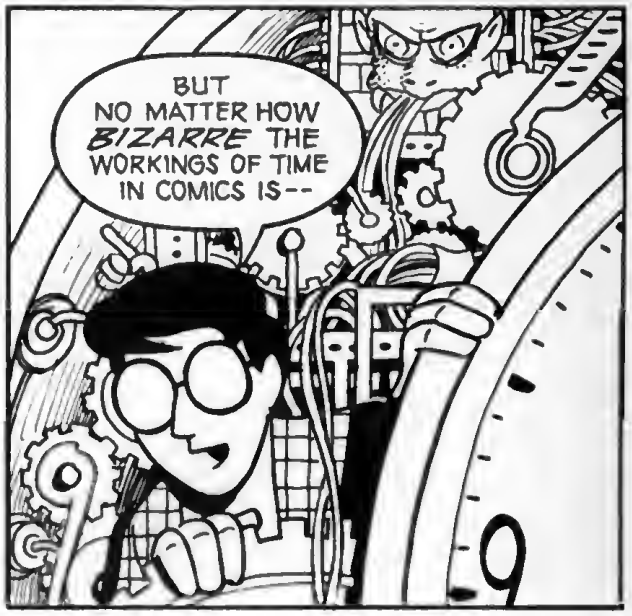

BOTH TYPES ADD TO THE DURATION OF A PANEL, PARTIALLY THROUGH THE NATURE OF SOUND ITSELF AND BY INTRODUCING ISSUES OF ACTION AND REACTION.


MOTION ALSO BREAKS DOWN INTO TWO SUBSETS. THE FIRST TYPE-- PANEL-TO-PANEL CLOSURE-- WAS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO MERIT ITS OWN CHAPTER.

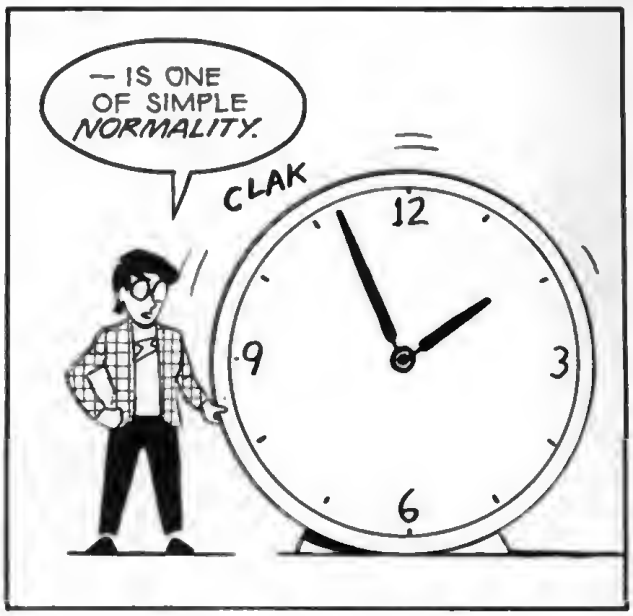

THE OTHER TYPE -- MOTION WITHIN PANELS--CAN BE FURTHER DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL DISTINCT STYLES. I'VE COVERED THE ONES I KNOW, BUT THERE MAY BE MANY OTHERS. TIME WILL TELL.

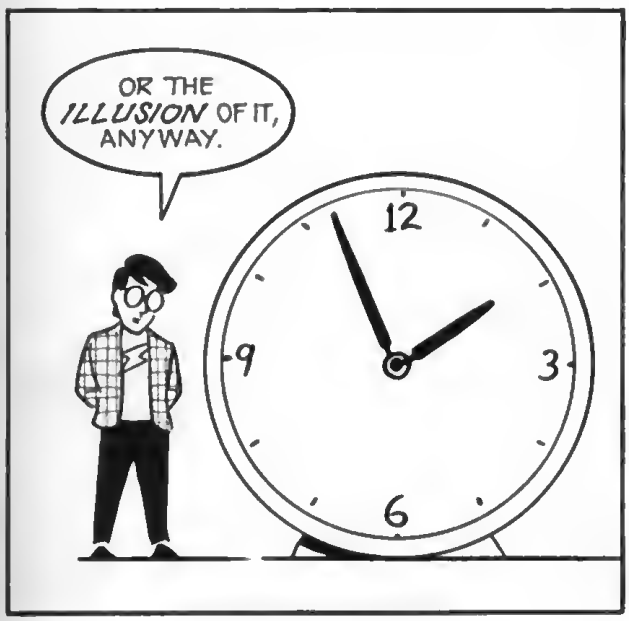

THE WORKINGS OF TIME IN COMICS SHOULD BE AS SIMPLE AS--
ONE--
--TWO--
--THREE--
--BUT THEY'RE NOT.
TICK TICK TICK


I'VE BEEN TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT MAKES COMICS "TICK" FOR YEARS AND I'M STILL AMAZED BY THE STRANGENESS OF IT ALL.
SNAP!
SNAP!
CRASH!!

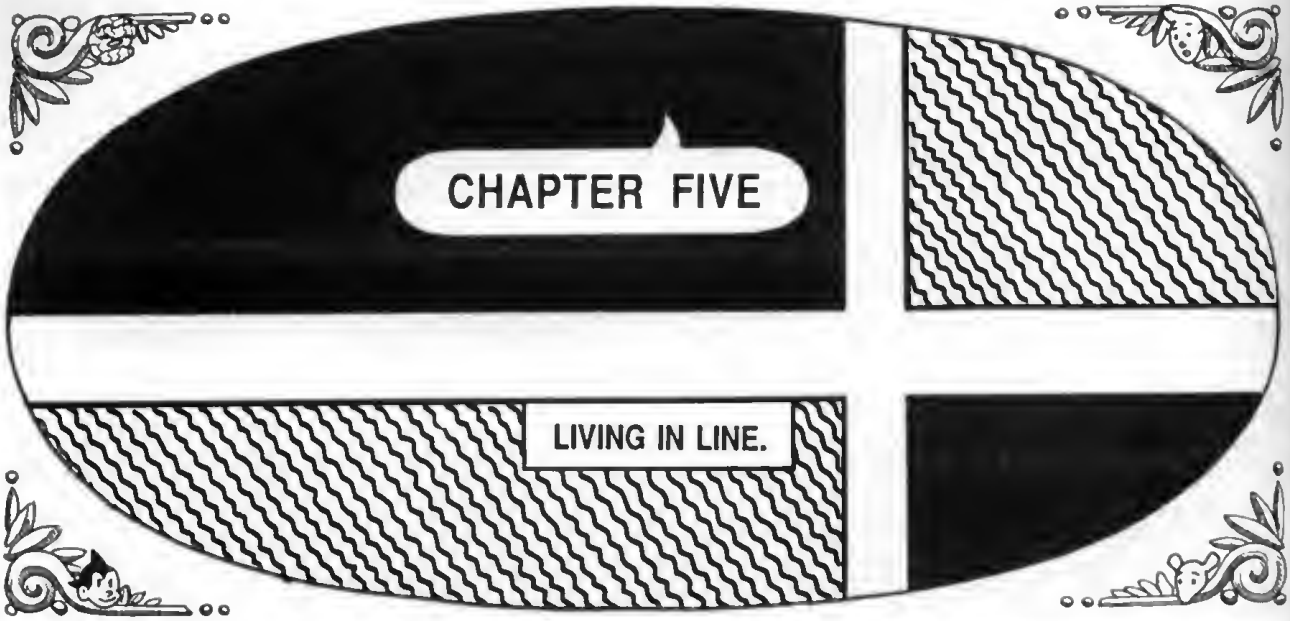

BUT NO MATTER HOW BIZARRE THE WORKINGS OF TIME IN COMICS IS--


--THE FACE IT PRESENTS TO THE READER--


-- IS ONE OF SIMPLE NORMALITY.
CLAK

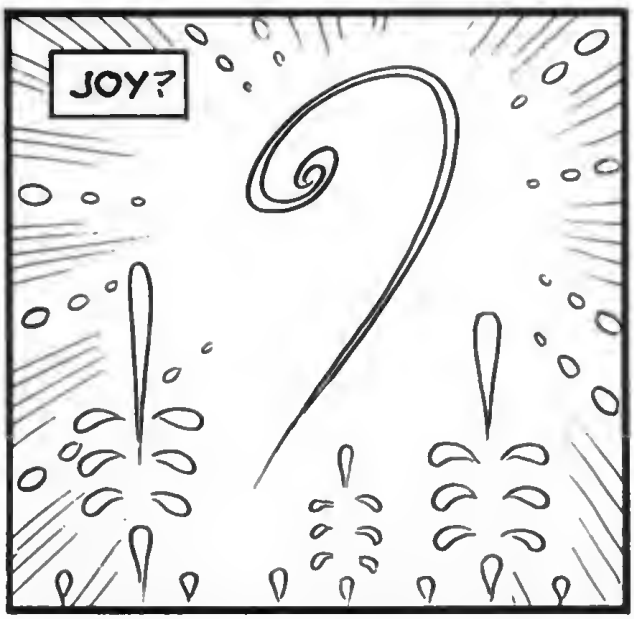

OR THE ILLUSION OF IT, ANYWAY.

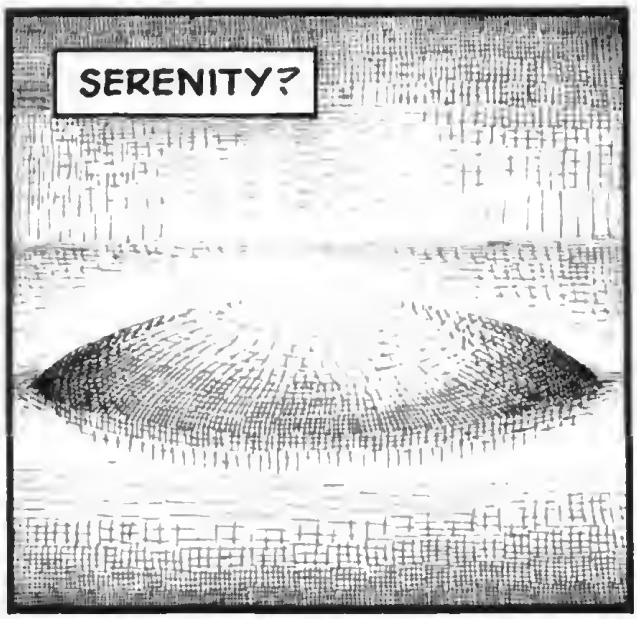

ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR FRAME OF MIND.

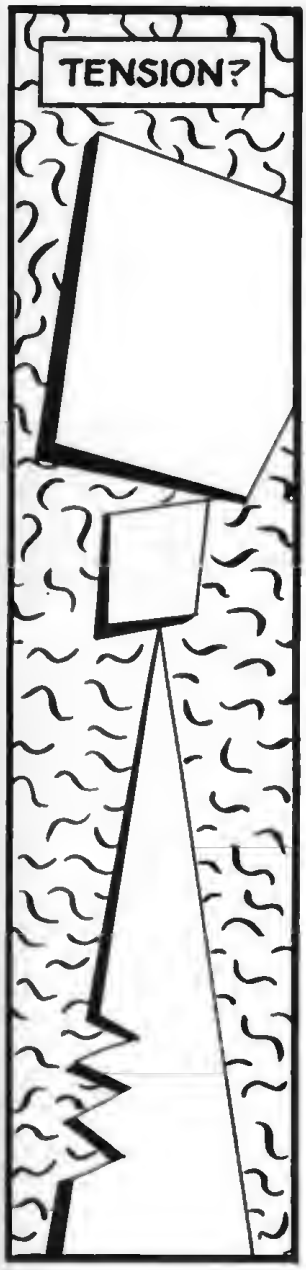

CHAPTER FIVE
LIVING IN LINE.

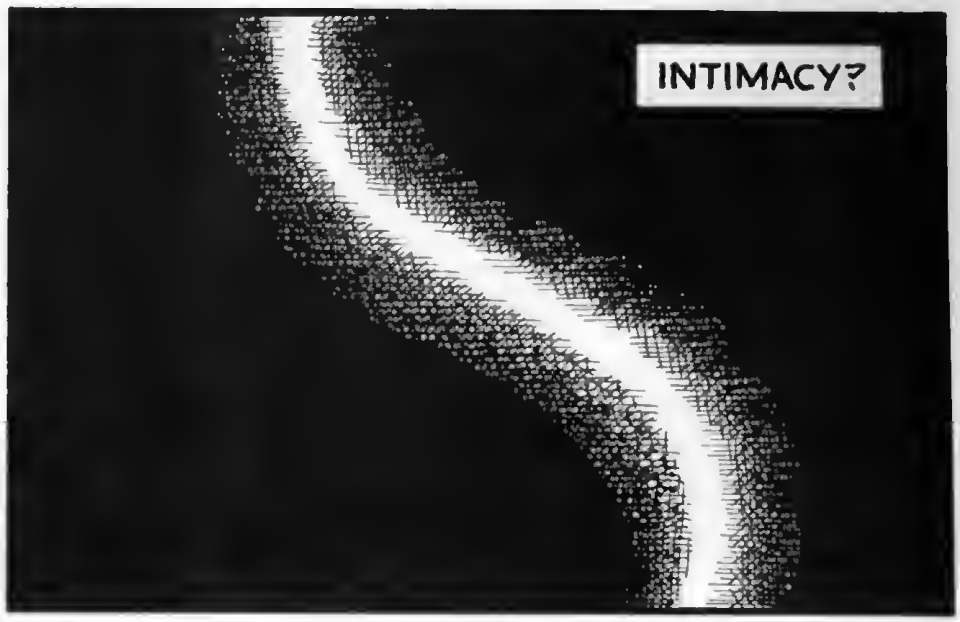

CAN EMOTIONS BE MADE VISIBLE?

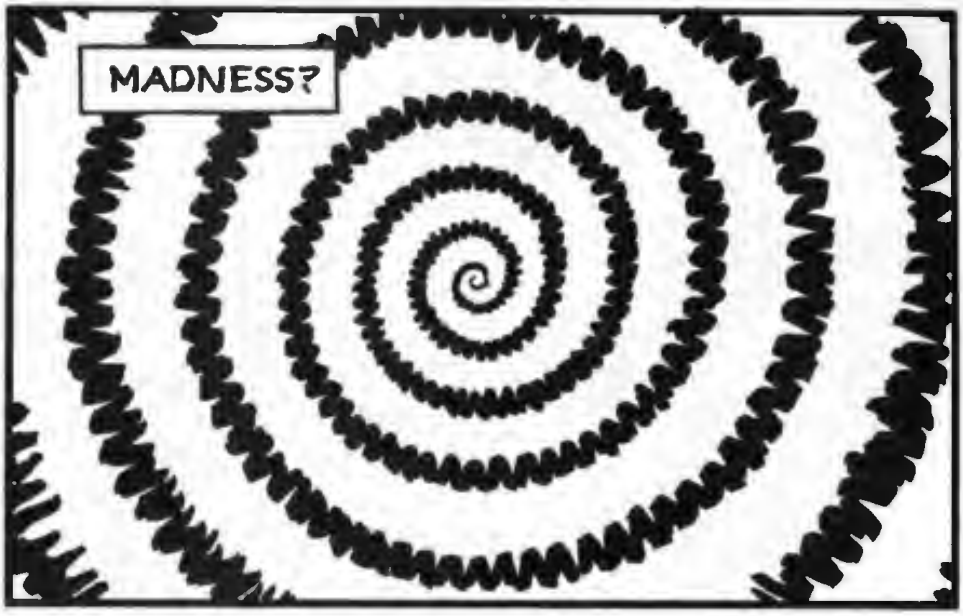

IS THIS ANGER?


JOY?


SERENITY?


TENSION?

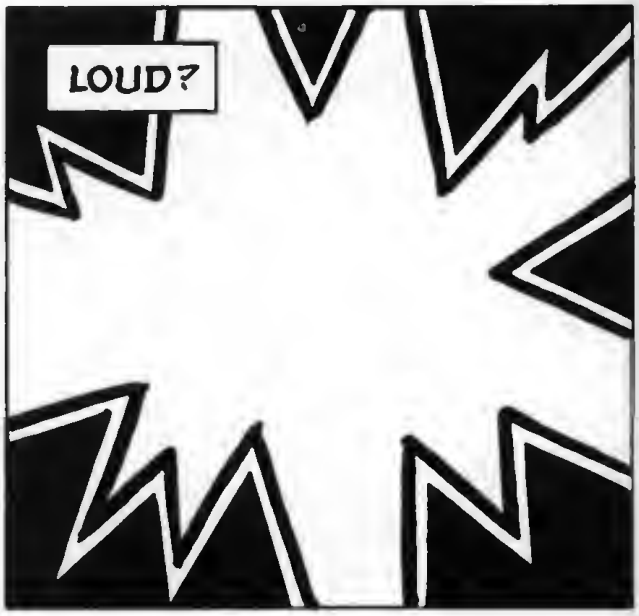

INTIMACY?

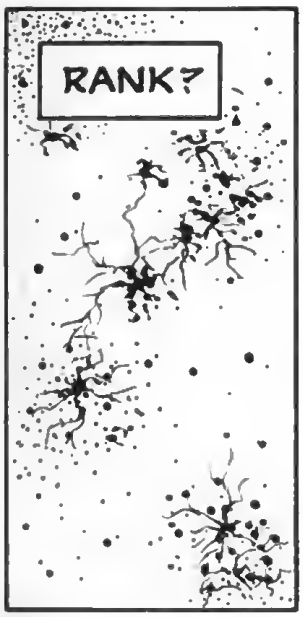

MADNESS?

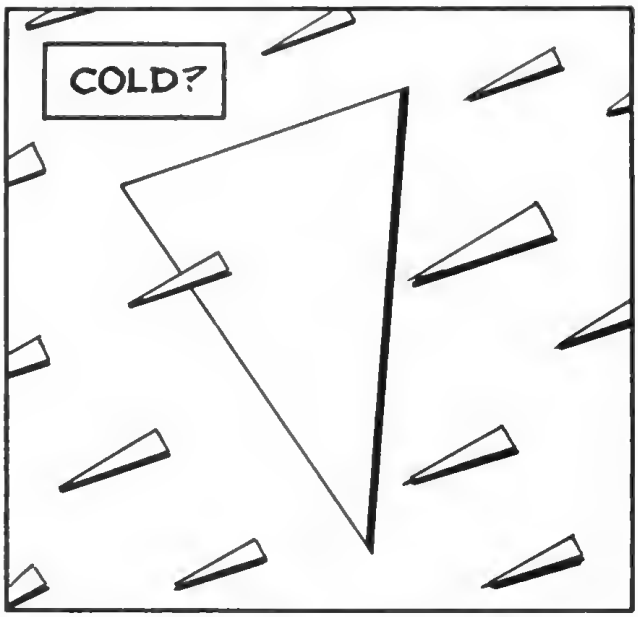

PRIDE?

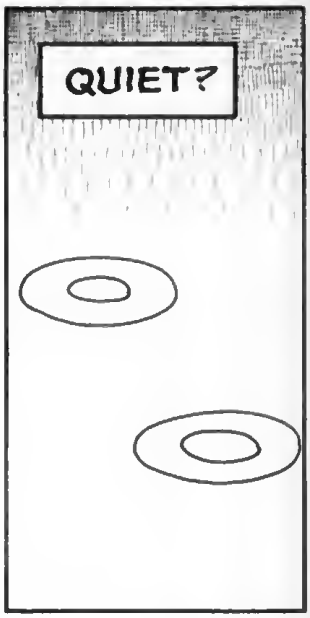

ANXIETY?


CAN ONE SENSE SPEAK FOR ALL FIVE?

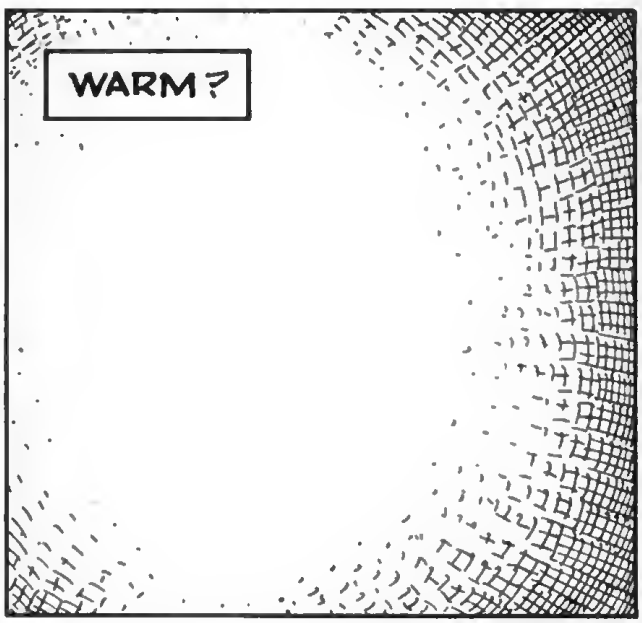

LOUD?


RANK?


COLD?

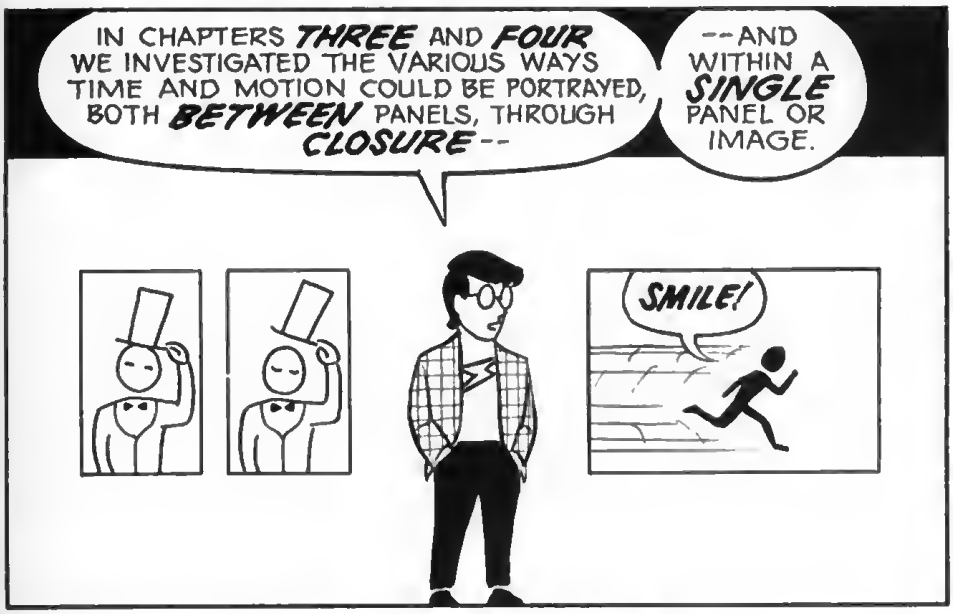

QUIET?


SOUR?


WARM?



SOME IMAGES INSPIRED BY THE PAINTINGS OF ADAM PHILIPS.













THE SCREAM 1895 LITHOGRAPH BY EDVARD MUNCH

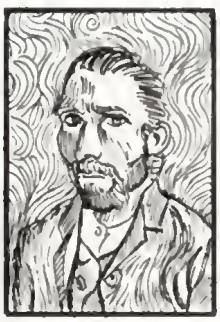
IN THE *LATE NINETEENTH* AND *EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES*, SOMETHING KIND OF ***SCARY*** WAS GOING ON...

NO SOONER HAD THE *IMPRESSIONISTS* FINALLY CONVINCED THEIR PEERS THAT THE WORLD *THEY* SAW WAS THE WORLD AS IT IS *TRULY* SEEN--

--THAN ANOTHER ***UNSEEN*** WORLD BEGAN TO MAKE ITSELF ***VISIBLE.***

IN THE WORKS OF ***EDVARD MUNCH*** AND ***VINCENT VAN GOGH***, THE OBJECTIVE STUDY OF LIGHT SO PRIZED BY THE *IMPRESSIONIST MAINSTREAM* WAS BEING *ABANDONED* IN FAVOR OF A NEW, FRIGHTENINGLY ***SUBJECTIVE*** APPROACH





EXPRESSIONISM, AS IT CAME TO BE CALLED, DIDN'T START AS A *SCIENTIFIC ART*, BUT RATHER AS AN HONEST *EXPRESSION* OF THE INTERNAL TURMOIL THESE ARTISTS JUST COULD NOT *REPRESS*.



THE *SCIENCE* OF IT WASN'T FAR *BEHIND* THOUGH!

AS THE *NEW CENTURY* GOT UNDER WAY, *COOLER HEADS* SUCH AS *WASSILY KANDINSKY* TOOK *GREAT INTEREST* IN THE POWER OF *LINE, SHAPE* AND *COLOR* TO SUGGEST THE INNER STATE OF THE ARTIST ***AND*** TO PROVOKE THE *FIVE SENSES.*

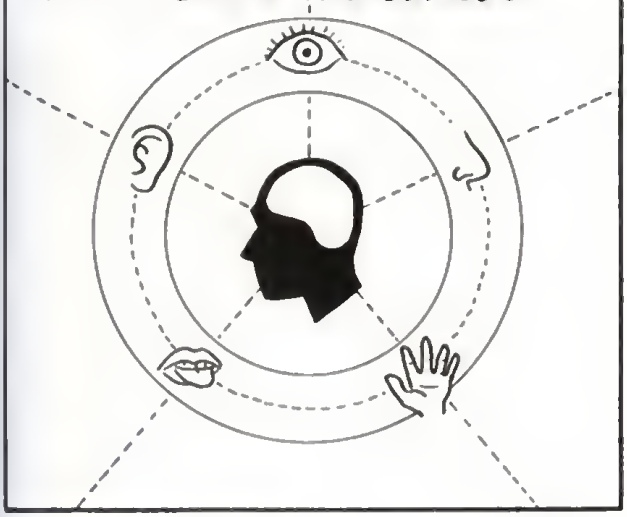


ANGRY *REDS*...
PLACID *BLUES*...
ANXIOUS *TEXTURES*...
LOUD *SHAPES*...
QUIET *LINES*...
COLD *GREENS*...

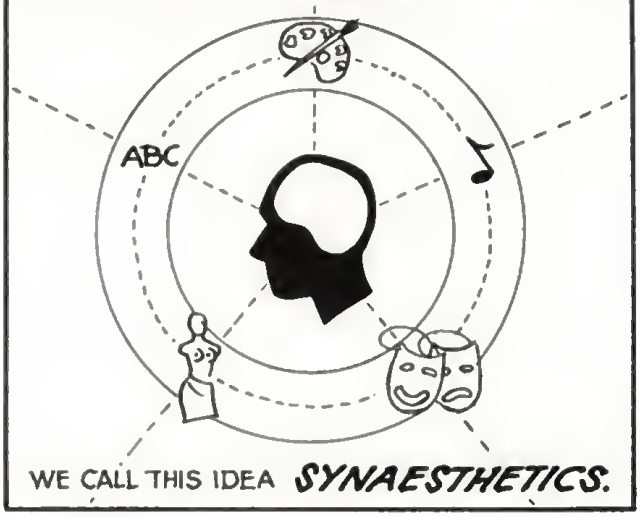
THESE WERE *STRANGE IDEAS* IN 1912!



KANDINSKY AND HIS PEERS WERE SEARCHING FOR AN ART THAT MIGHT SOMEHOW ***UNITE THE SENSES***--



--AND IN *DOING SO,* UNITE THE DIFFERENT ARTFORMS WHICH *APPEALED* TO THOSE DIFFERENT SENSES.



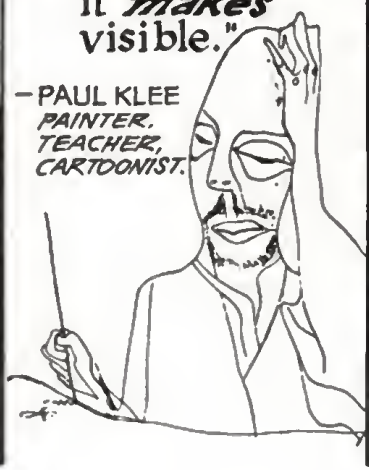
WE CALL THIS IDEA ***SYNAESTHETICS.***

NOT *SURPRISING,* THEN, THAT SIMILAR IDEAS WERE EXPRESSED BY CREATORS IN *OTHER* FIELDS SUCH AS *RICHARD WAGNER* AND THE FRENCH POET *BAUDELAIRE.*



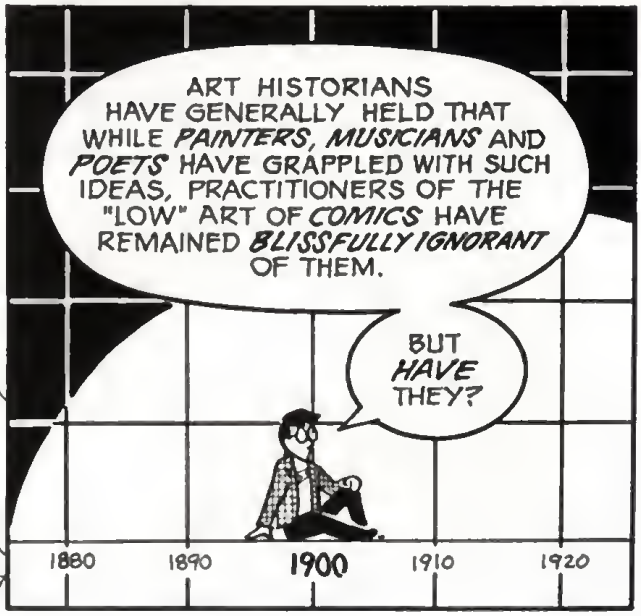
"Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it ***makes*** visible."

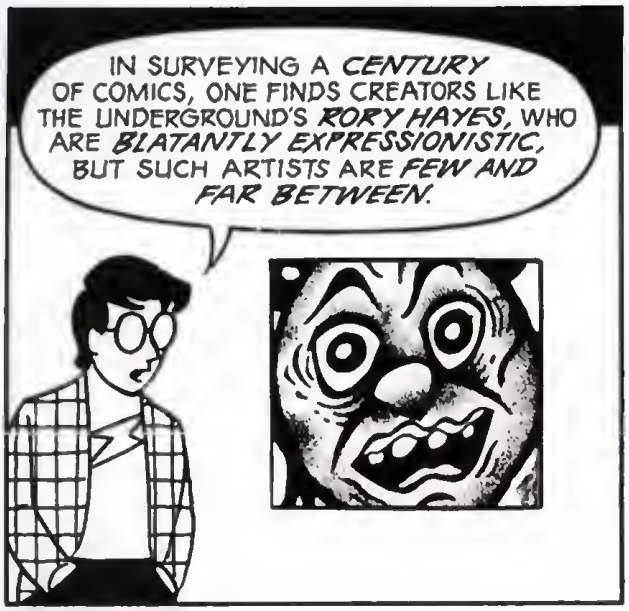
–PAUL KLEE
PAINTER, TEACHER, CARTOONIST.

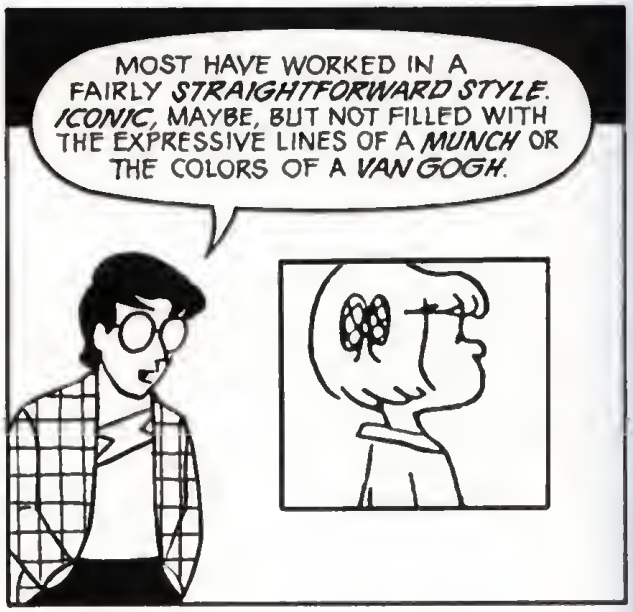


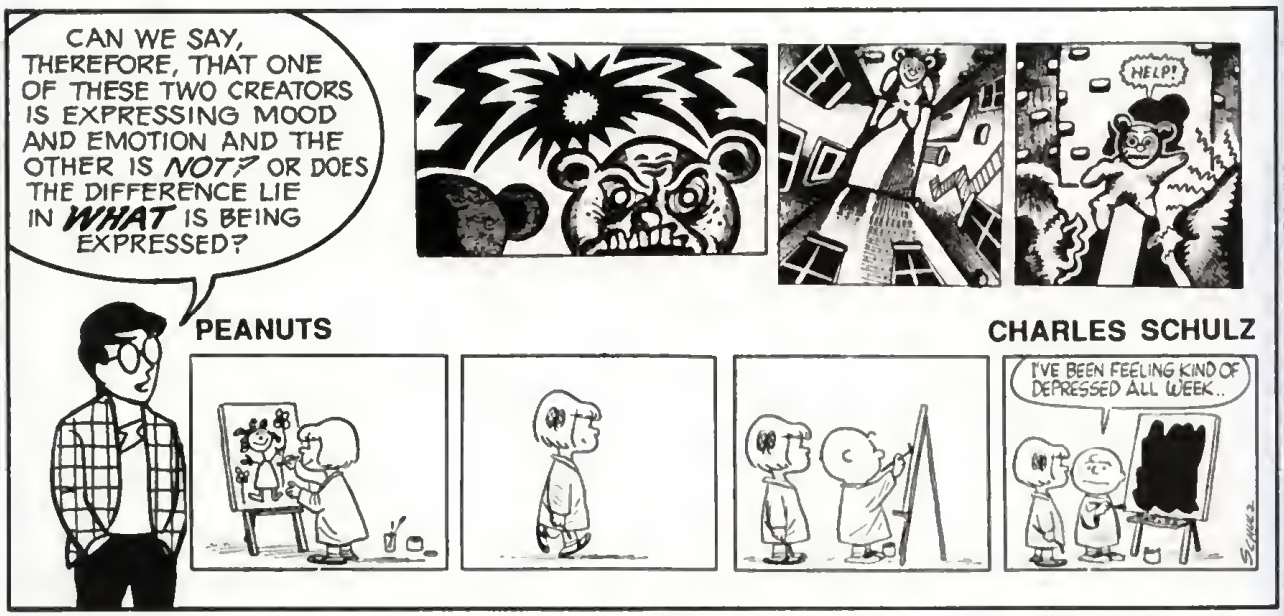
ART HISTORIANS HAVE GENERALLY HELD THAT WHILE *PAINTERS, MUSICIANS* AND *POETS* HAVE GRAPPLED WITH SUCH IDEAS, PRACTITIONERS OF THE "LOW" ART OF *COMICS* HAVE REMAINED ***BLISSFULLY IGNORANT*** OF THEM.

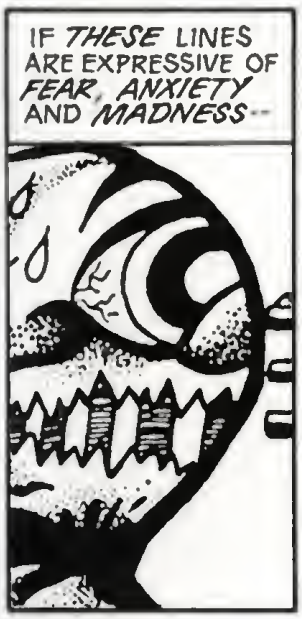
BUT *HAVE* THEY?

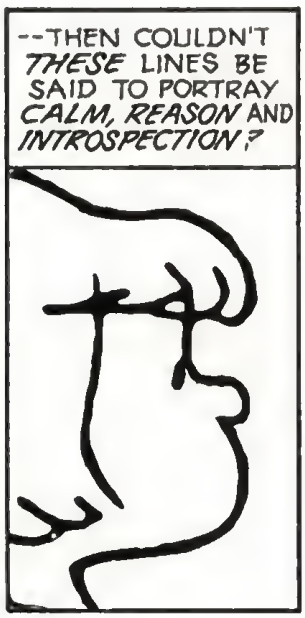


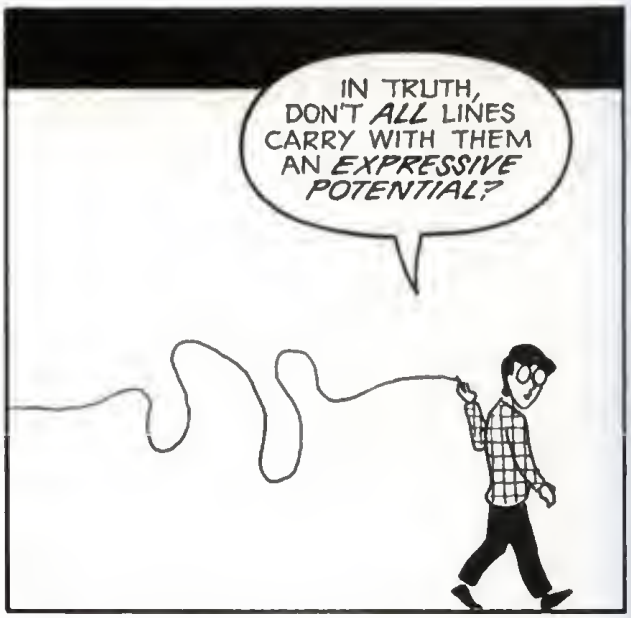




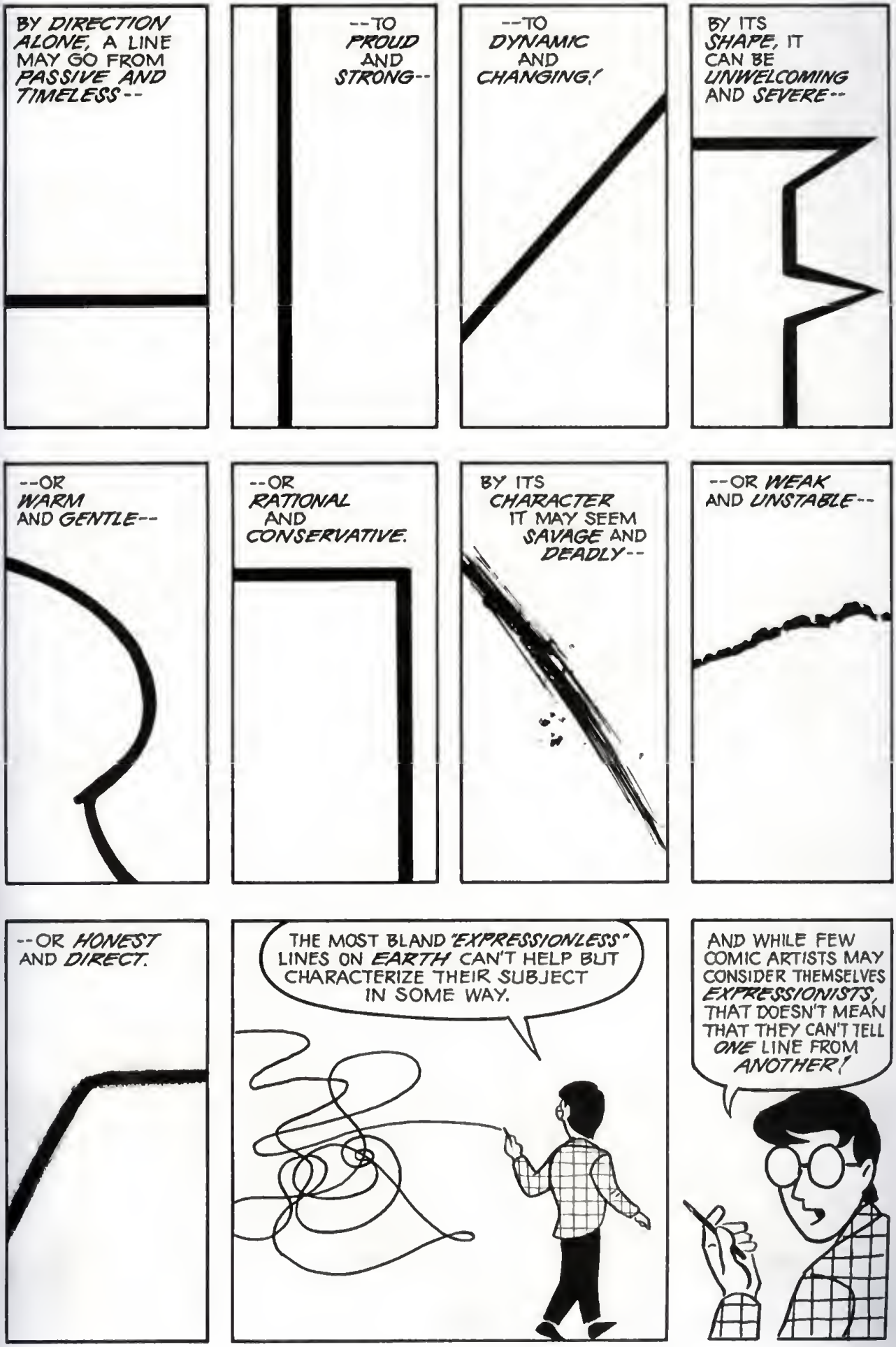








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BY DIRECTION ALONE, A LINE MAY GO FROM PASSIVE AND TIMELESS--
--TO PROUD AND STRONG--
--TO DYNAMIC AND CHANGING!
BY ITS SHAPE, IT CAN BE UNWELCOMING AND SEVERE--
--OR WARM AND GENTLE--
--OR RATIONAL AND CONSERVATIVE.
BY ITS CHARACTER IT MAY SEEM SAVAGE AND DEADLY--
--OR WEAK AND UNSTABLE--
--OR HONEST AND DIRECT.
THE MOST BLAND "EXPRESSIONLESS" LINES ON EARTH CAN'T HELP BUT CHARACTERIZE THEIR SUBJECT IN SOME WAY.
AND WHILE FEW COMIC ARTISTS MAY CONSIDER THEMSELVES EXPRESSIONISTS, THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEY CAN'T TELL ONE LINE FROM ANOTHER!

IN *DICK TRACY*, FOR EXAMPLE, CHESTER GOULD USED *BOLD LINES, OBTUSE ANGLES* AND *HEAVY BLACKS* TO SUGGEST THE MOOD OF A *GRIM, DEADLY* WORLD OF *ADULTS*--



--WHILE THE *GENTLE CURVES* AND *OPEN LINES* OF *CARL BARKS'* ***UNCLE SCROOGE*** CONVEY A FEELING OF *WHIMSY, YOUTH* AND *INNOCENCE*.



IN *R. CRUMB'S* WORLD, THE *CURVES* OF *INNOCENCE* ARE ***BETRAYED*** BY THE *NEUROTIC QUILL-LINES* OF *MODERN ADULTHOOD*, AND LEFT *PAINFULLY OUT OF PLACE*--



--WHILE IN *KRYSTINE KRYTTRE'S* ART, THE CURVES OF CHILDHOOD AND THE MAD LINES OF A *MUNCH* CREATE A *CRAZY TODDLER LOOK*.



IN THE *MID-1960s* WHEN THE *AVERAGE MARVEL READER* WAS *PRE-ADOLESCENT*, POPULAR INKERS USED *DYNAMIC* BUT *FRIENDLY* LINES A LA *KIRBY/SINNOTT*.



BUT WHEN MARVEL'S READER BASE *GREW* INTO THE *ANXIETIES* OF ***ADOLESCENCE***, THE *HOSTILE, JAGGED* LINES OF A *ROB LIEFELD* STRUCK A MORE *RESPONSIVE CHORD*.



FOR *DECADES* OF COLOR COMIC BOOKS, THE *SIGNATURE STYLES* OF INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS LIKE *NICK CARDY* HAVE INFUSED *PERSONAL EXPRESSION* INTO *EVERY STORY*--



--WHILE *JULES FEIFFER'S UNEVEN LINES* DID ***BATTLE*** WITH THEMSELVES IN A *PANTOMIME* OF THE *INNER STRUGGLES* OF *MODERN LIFE*.



IN *JOSÉ MUNOZ'S* WORK, *DENSE PUDDLES OF INK* AND *FRAYING LINEWORK COMBINE* TO EVOKE A WORLD OF *DEPRAVITY* AND *MORBID DECAY*--



--WHILE *JOOST SWARTE'S CRISP ELEGANT LINES* AND *JAZZY DESIGNS* SPEAK OF *COOL SOPHISTICATION* AND *IRONY*.



IN SPIEGELMAN'S *"PRISONER ON THE HELL PLANET," DELIBERATELY EXPRESSIONISTIC LINES* DEPICT A *TRUE-LIFE HORROR STORY*.



AND IN EISNER'S *MODERN* WORK A ***FULL RANGE*** OF LINE STYLES CAPTURE A FULL RANGE OF MOODS AND *EMOTIONS*.



SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION.





NOW, IF PICTURES CAN, THROUGH THEIR RENDERING, REPRESENT *INVISIBLE* CONCERNS SUCH AS *EMOTIONS* AND THE *OTHER SENSES*--

--THEN THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PICTURES AND *OTHER* TYPES OF ICONS LIKE LANGUAGE WHICH *SPECIALIZE* IN THE INVISIBLE MAY SEEM A BIT *BLURRY*.

IN FACT, WHAT WE'RE SEEING IN THE *LIVING LINES* OF THESE PICTURES IS *THE PRIMORDIAL STUFF* FROM WHICH A *FORMALIZED LANGUAGE* CAN *EVOLVE!*

I'LL GIVE YOU AN *EXAMPLE*.

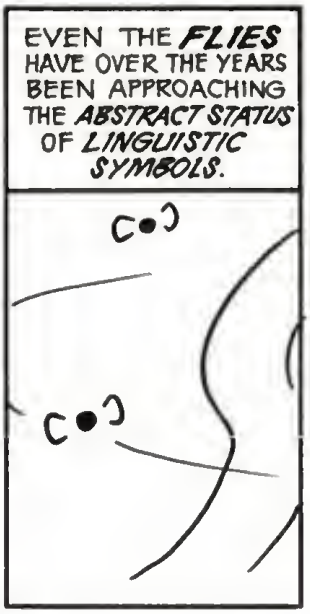
LET'S SAY I WANTED TO SMOKE THIS *PIPE*--

--ASSUMING IT *IS* A PIPE--

--AND I LIT IT WITH A MATCH LIKE *SO:*


COUGH!
COUGH!
NOW, YOU'LL NOTICE COUGH! AHEM! YOU'LL NOTICE A FEW WAVY LINES RISING FROM THE PIPE.
THIS IS THE ARTIST'S CARTOONY WAY OF TELLING YOU THERE'S SMOKE COMING FROM THE PIPE. YOU'VE ALL SEEN IT BEFORE, RIGHT?
NOW, LET'S SUPPOSE THAT MY PIPE AND I HAVE GONE FOR A LITTLE WALK--
--AND COME ACROSS AN OVERTURNED GARBAGE CAN.
THE STRONG SMELL OF ROTTEN GARBAGE CAN'T BE SEEN, YET HERE'S ANOTHER PRETTY SIMILAR SET OF WAVY LINES.
DESPITE THEIR SUPERFICIAL RESEMBLANCE, THESE ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT SETS OF LINES. ONE REPRESENTS A VISIBLE PHENOMENON, SMOKE, WHILE THE OTHER REPRESENTS AN INVISIBLE ONE, OUR SENSE OF SMELL.
NOT REALLY A PICTURE ANYMORE, THESE LINES ARE MORE A VISUAL METAPHOR-- A SYMBOL.
AND SYMBOLS ARE THE BASIS OF LANGUAGE!

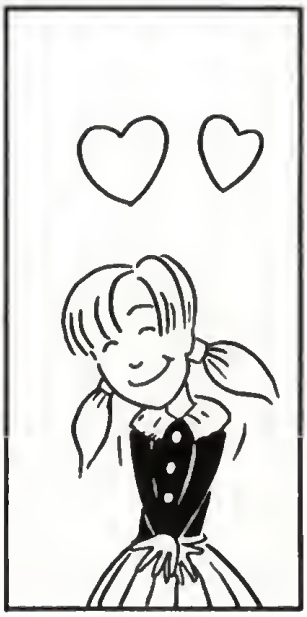

TAKEN OUT OF THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT, THEY CAN NOW BE APPLIED ANYWHERE AND THE READER WILL INSTANTLY KNOW WHAT THEY MEAN.


EVEN THE FLIES HAVE OVER THE YEARS BEEN APPROACHING THE ABSTRACT STATUS OF LINGUISTIC SYMBOLS.


WHENEVER AN ARTIST INVENTS A NEW WAY TO REPRESENT THE INVISIBLE, THERE IS ALWAYS A CHANCE THAT IT WILL BE PICKED UP BY OTHER ARTISTS.


IF ENOUGH ARTISTS BEGIN USING THE SYMBOL, IT WILL ENTER THE LANGUAGE FOR GOOD--
--AS MANY HAVE THROUGH THE YEARS.



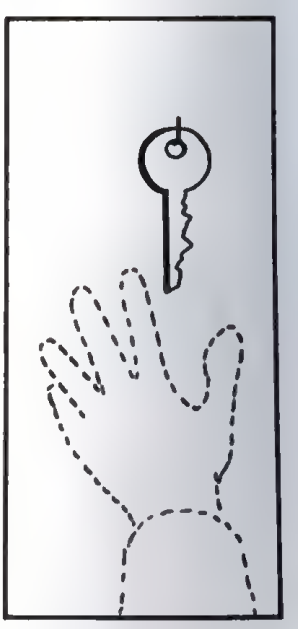


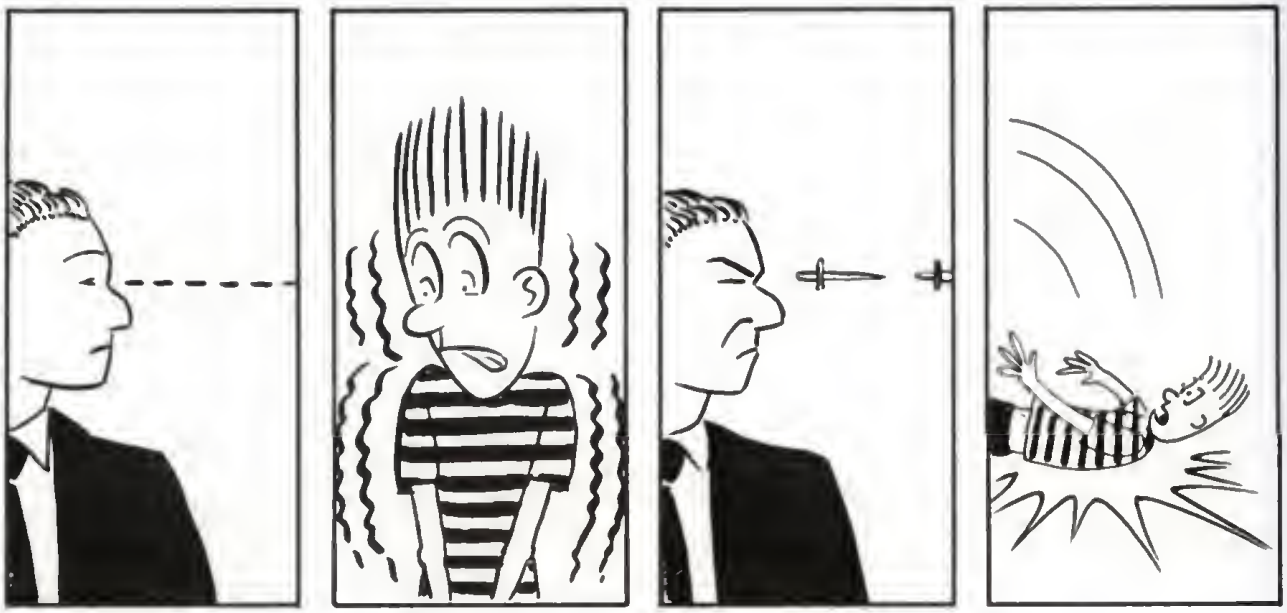







HIC






IN DEALING WITH THE FACE *ITSELF*, THE LINE BETWEEN THE *VISIBLE* AND *INVISIBLE* WORLDS BECOMES EVEN *LESS CLEAR*.


THE CARTOON FACE IS AN *ABSTRACT*, BUT IT IS BASED UPON *VISUAL DATA*.


SOME INDICATORS OF EMOTION ARE *ALSO* VISUALLY BASED, SUCH AS THE FAMILIAR *SWEAT BEAD*.


BUT WHEN SUCH IMAGES BEGIN TO DRIFT *OUT* OF THEIR *VISUAL CONTEXT*--


--THEY DRIFT *INTO* THE *INVISIBLE WORLD* OF THE *SYMBOL*.


THIS DRIFT FROM *VISIBLE* TO *INVISIBLE* HAS BEEN THE BASIS OF ALL *WRITTEN LANGUAGES* SINCE CIVILIZATION *BEGAN*.

SUMERIANS IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA GOT THINGS ROLLING OVER *5,000 YEARS AGO* WHEN A NEED WAS FOUND TO RECORD CERTAIN *COMMODITIES.*

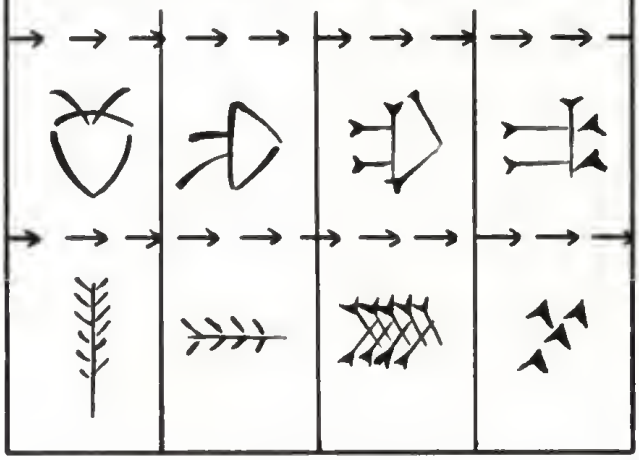


OX



GRAIN

THESE FIRST SYMBOLS -- *CARTOONS,* REALLY -- GRADUALLY EVOLVED AWAY FROM *ANY* RESEMBLANCE TO THEIR SUBJECT, TOWARD THE HIGHLY ABSTRACTED FORMS OF MODERN LANGUAGES...



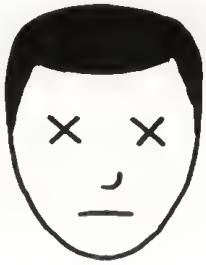
...AND *EVENTUALLY* TO OUR *TOTALLY* ABSTRACT *SOUND-BASED* SYSTEM.



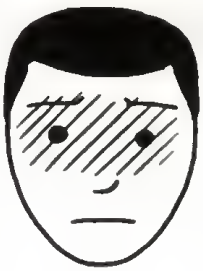
THE LONGER ANY FORM OF ART OR COMMUNICATION EXISTS, THE MORE *SYMBOLS* IT ACCUMULATES.



THE MODERN COMIC IS A YOUNG LANGUAGE, BUT IT ALREADY HAS AN *IMPRESSIVE ARRAY* OF *RECOGNIZABLE SYMBOLS.*



AND THIS *VISUAL VOCABULARY* HAS AN *UNLIMITED POTENTIAL* FOR *GROWTH.*



WITHIN A GIVEN CULTURE THESE SYMBOLS WILL QUICKLY SPREAD UNTIL EVERYBODY KNOWS THEM AT A GLANCE.



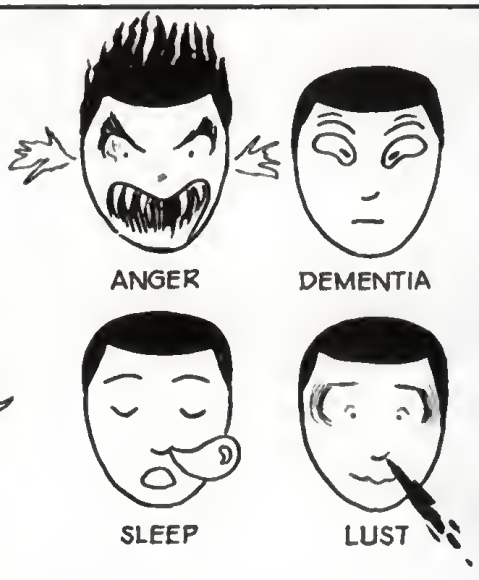
BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A LANGUAGE EVOLVES IN MORE THAN ONE DISTINCT CULTURE AT A TIME?



THE ANSWER, OF COURSE, IS THAT MORE THAN ONE SET OF SYMBOLS WILL EVOLVE!

SO IT WAS, ONCE AGAIN, IN *JAPAN* WHERE COMICS DEVELOPED FOR *YEARS* IN RELATIVE *ISOLATION* FROM THEIR WESTERN COUSINS.





ANGER

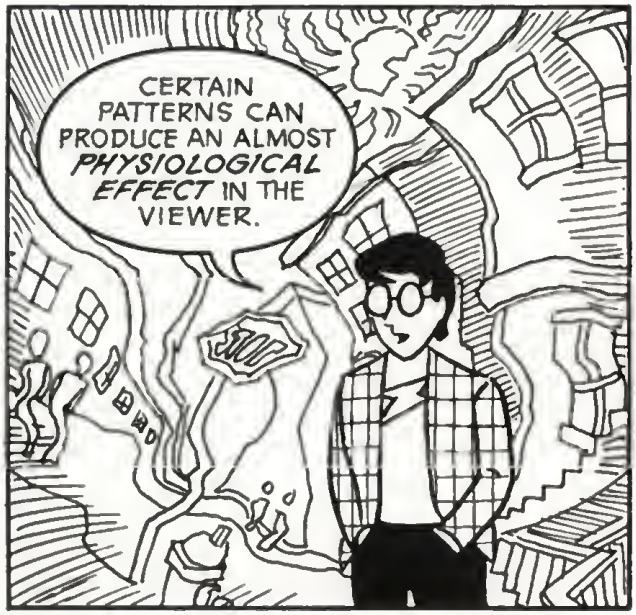
DEMENTIA

SLEEP

LUST

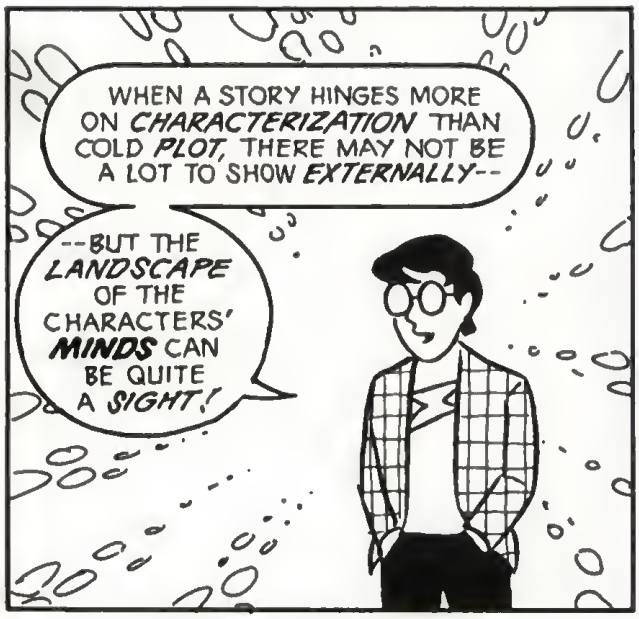

BACKGROUNDS CAN BE ANOTHER VALUABLE TOOL FOR INDICATING INVISIBLE IDEAS... PARTICULARLY THE WORLD OF EMOTIONS.


EVEN WHEN THERE IS LITTLE OR NO DISTORTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN A GIVEN SCENE, A DISTORTED OR EXPRESSIONISTIC BACKGROUND WILL USUALLY AFFECT OUR "READING" OF CHARACTERS' INNER STATES.


CERTAIN PATTERNS CAN PRODUCE AN ALMOST PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECT IN THE VIEWER.


BUT FOR SOME REASON, READERS WILL ASCRIBE THOSE FEELINGS, NOT TO THEMSELVES, BUT TO THE CHARACTERS THEY IDENTIFY WITH.

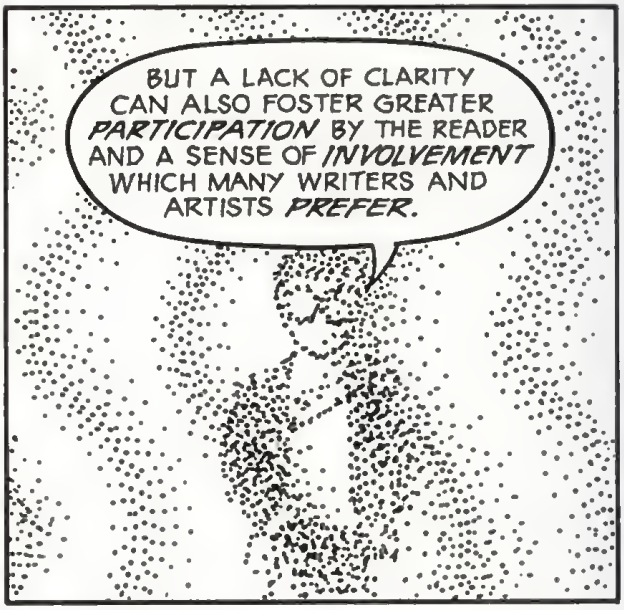

SUCH INTERNAL EFFECTS ARE, OF COURSE, BEST SUITED TO STORIES ABOUT INTERNAL MATTERS.

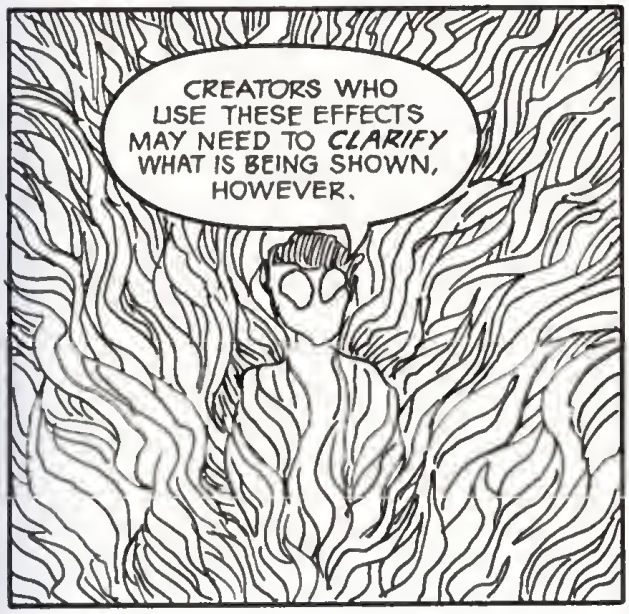

WHEN A STORY HINGES MORE ON CHARACTERIZATION THAN COLD PLOT, THERE MAY NOT BE A LOT TO SHOW EXTERNALLY--
--BUT THE LANDSCAPE OF THE CHARACTERS' MINDS CAN BE QUITE A SIGHT!



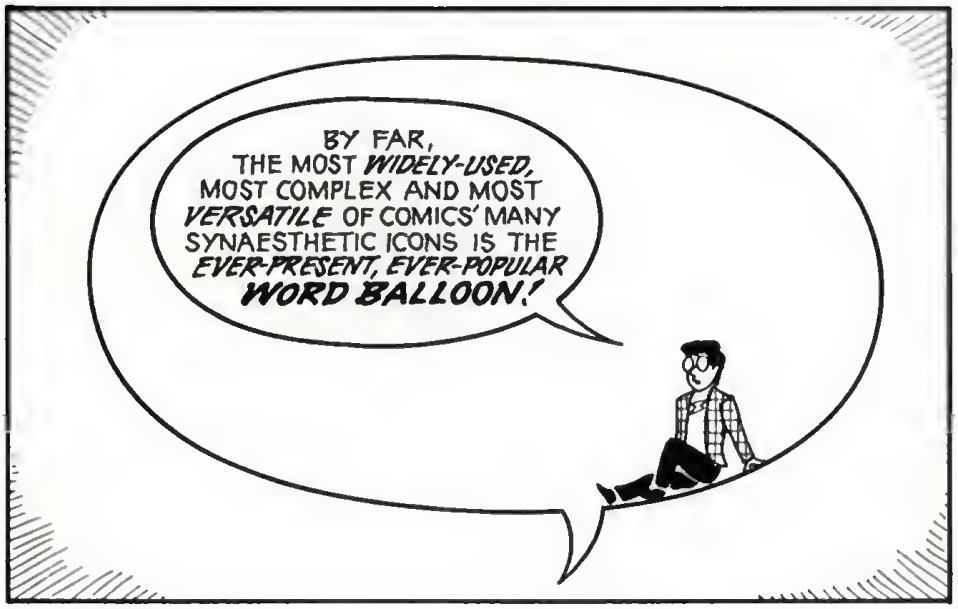
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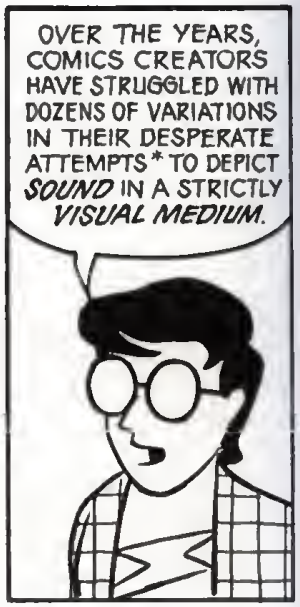


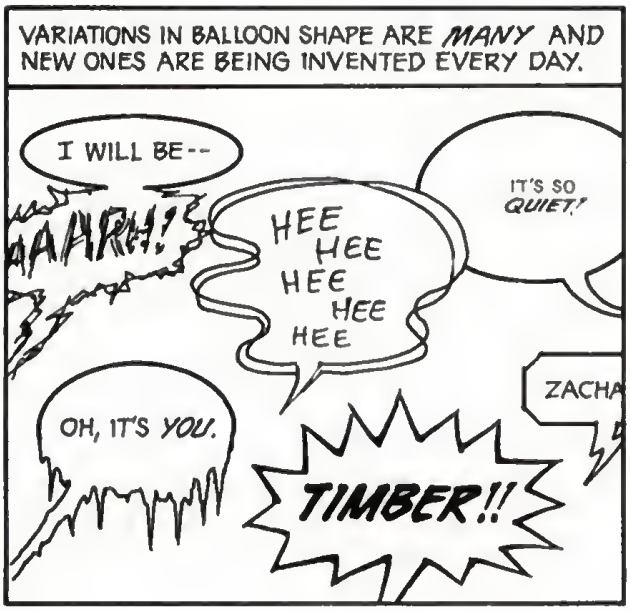


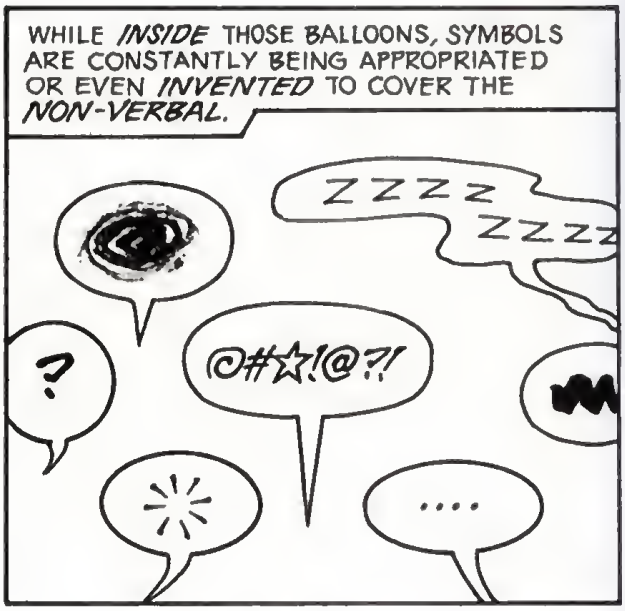


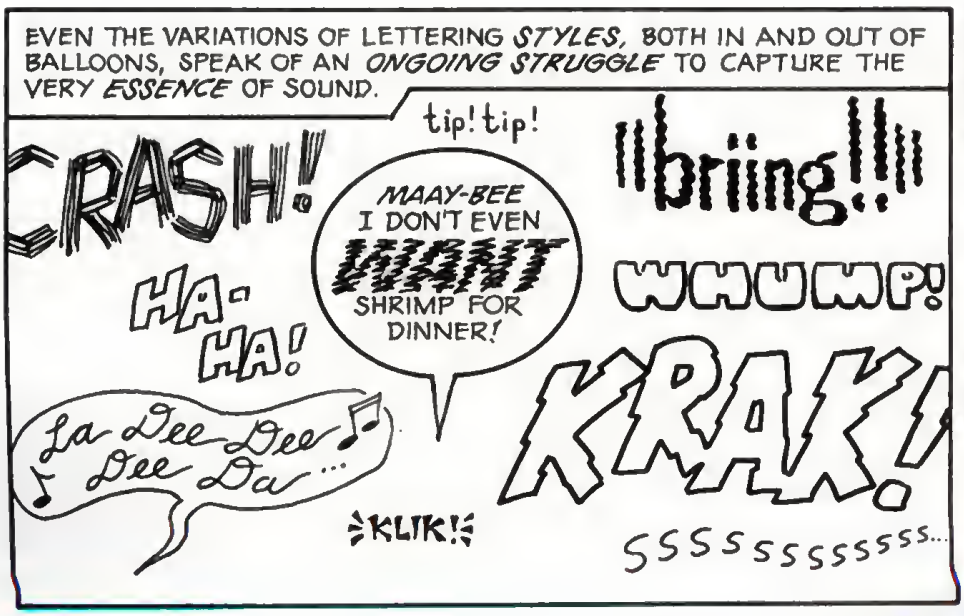














* EISNER DESCRIBES THE WORD BALLOON AS A "DESPERATION DEVICE."

OF COURSE WORDS *THEMSELVES*, MORE THAN ALL THE OTHER VISUAL SYMBOLS, HAVE THE POWER TO *COMPLETELY DESCRIBE* THE *INVISIBLE REALM* OF *SENSES AND EMOTIONS.*

WORDS CAN TAKE EVEN SEEMINGLY *NEUTRAL* IMAGES AND INVEST THEM WITH A *WEALTH* OF *FEELINGS* AND *EXPERIENCES.*

I SAT BY THE OPEN WINDOW, HOPING TO CATCH A WHIFF OF THE OLD CHARCOAL GRILLS. FROM NEXT DOOR CAME THE OTHERWORLDLY HUM OF TELEVISION. THE OLD CLOCK STRUCK A LAZY EIGHT.

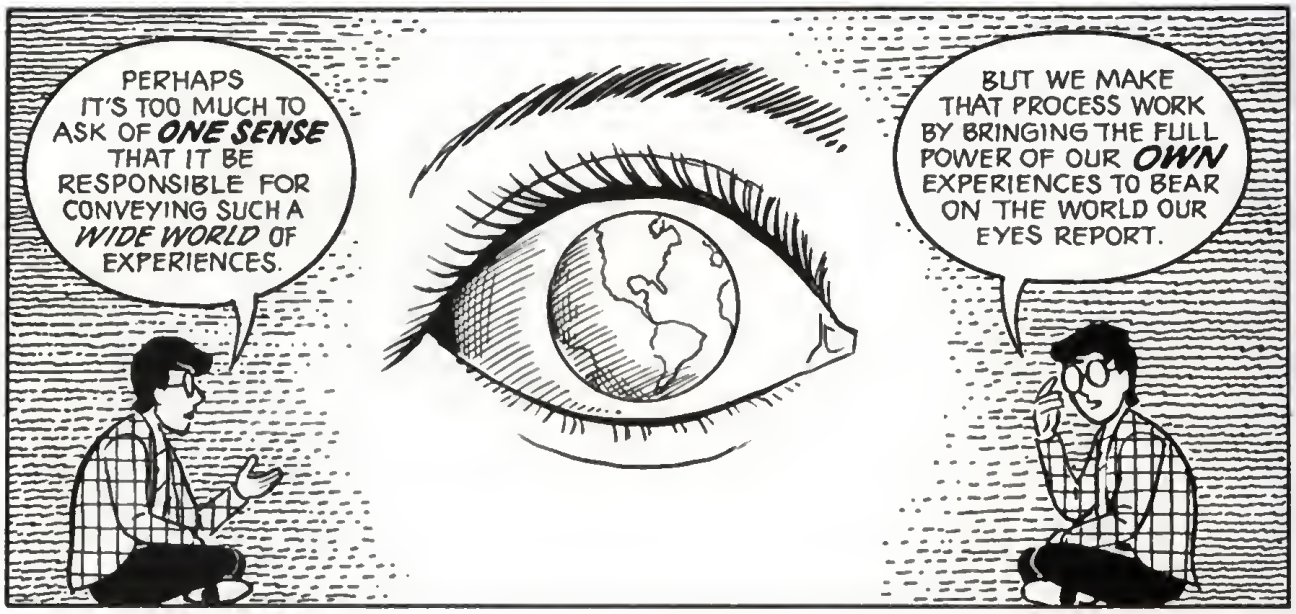
AS NOTED, PICTURES CAN INDUCE *STRONG FEELINGS* IN THE READER, BUT THEY CAN ALSO LACK THE *SPECIFICITY* OF WORDS.

WORDS, ON THE OTHER HAND, OFFER THAT SPECIFICITY, BUT CAN LACK THE IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL CHARGE OF PICTURES, RELYING INSTEAD ON A GRADUAL *CUMULATIVE* EFFECT.

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I'M ON TO YOUR PLOT... I KNOW YOU PUT SOMETHING IN MY DOG'S FOOD THAT MADE HIM NOT LOVE ME ANYMORE AND...

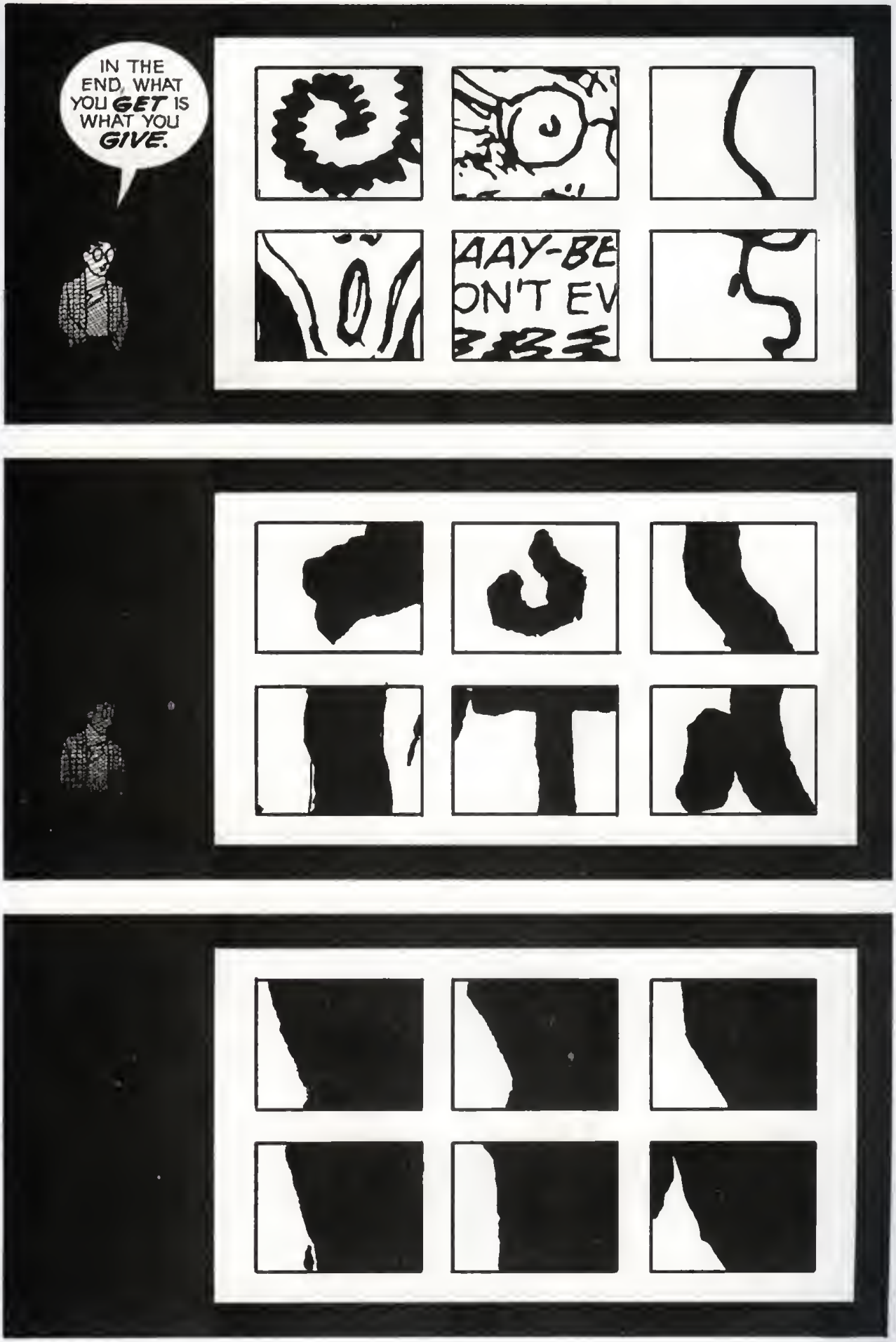
TOGETHER, OF COURSE, WORDS AND PICTURES CAN WORK MIRACLES.

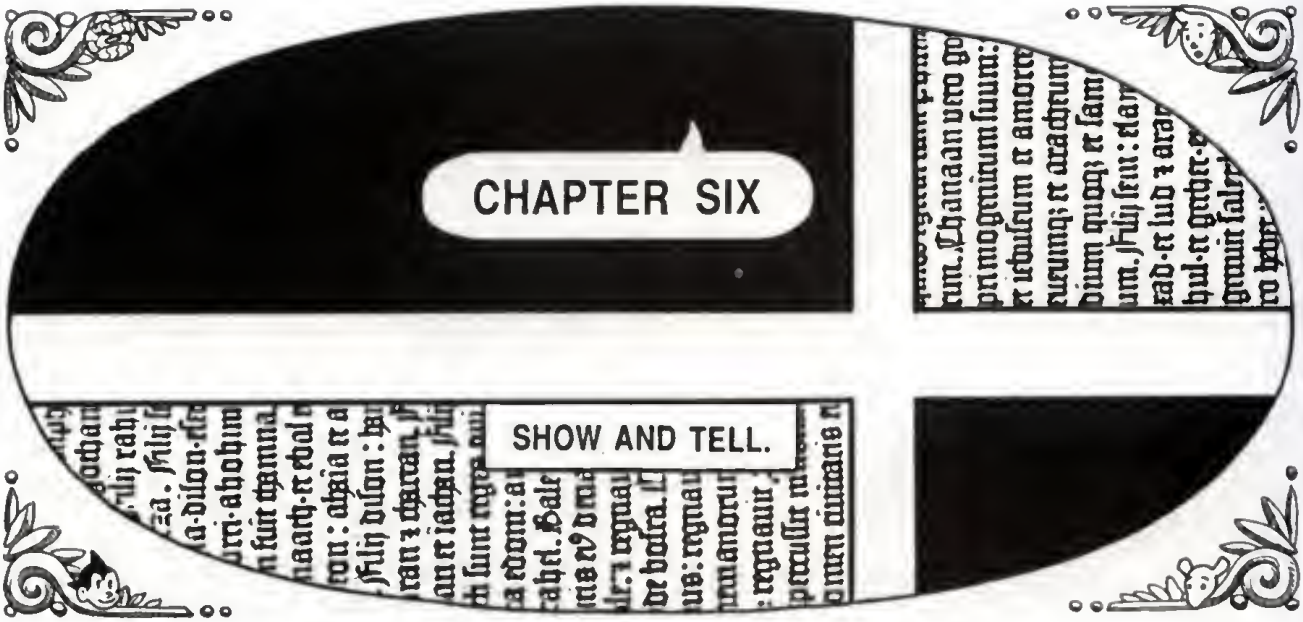
BUT WE'LL GET TO THAT IN THE *NEXT CHAPTER.*


PERHAPS IT'S TOO MUCH TO ASK OF ONE SENSE THAT IT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CONVEYING SUCH A WIDE WORLD OF EXPERIENCES.
BUT WE MAKE THAT PROCESS WORK BY BRINGING THE FULL POWER OF OUR OWN EXPERIENCES TO BEAR ON THE WORLD OUR EYES REPORT.


IN THIS CHAPTER, WE'VE DEALT WITH THE INVISIBLE WORLDS OF SENSES AND EMOTIONS, BUT IN FACT ALL ASPECTS OF COMICS SHOW IT TO BE AN ART OF THE INVISIBLE.
MAAY-BEE I DON'T EVEN WANT SHRIMP FOR DINNER!


WHAT YOU SEE IS SELDOM WHAT YOU GET IF ALL YOU'RE SEEING (SEEING EVEN NOW) IS JUST INK AND PAPER.
MAAY-BEE I DON'T EVEN


IN THE END, WHAT YOU GET IS WHAT YOU GIVE.
AAY-BE
ON'T EV


CHAPTER SIX
SHOW AND TELL.




THIS IS MY ROBOT.

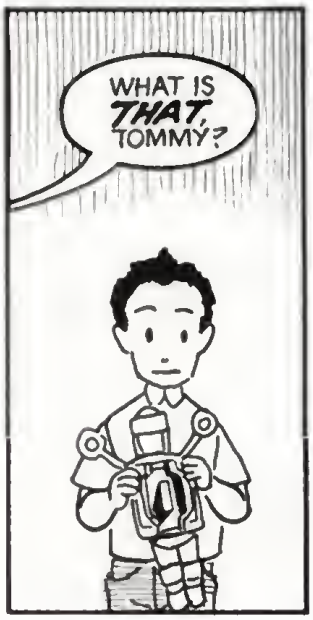


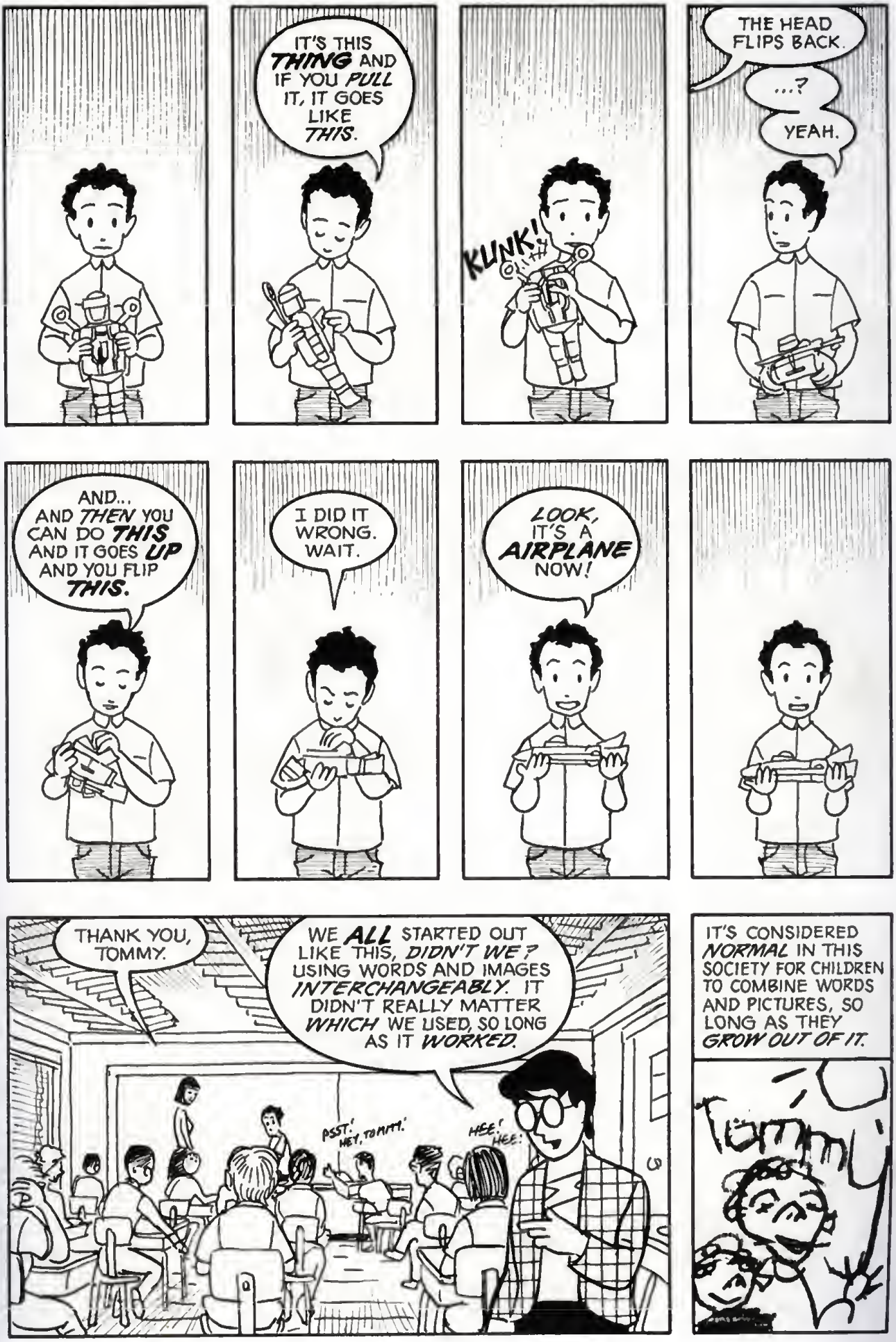

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR ROBOT, TOMMY?


WELL, UH... I LIKE IT 'CAUSE... 'CAUSE, UH...


IT'S GOT ONE OF THESE THINGS.




WHAT IS THAT, TOMMY?


IT'S THIS THING AND IF YOU PULL IT, IT GOES LIKE THIS.
KLUNK!
THE HEAD FLIPS BACK.
...?
YEAH.
AND... AND THEN YOU CAN DO THIS AND IT GOES UP AND YOU FLIP THIS.
I DID IT WRONG. WAIT.
LOOK, IT'S A AIRPLANE NOW!
THANK YOU, TOMMY.
WE ALL STARTED OUT LIKE THIS, DIDN'T WE? USING WORDS AND IMAGES INTERCHANGEABLY. IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER WHICH WE USED, SO LONG AS IT WORKED.
PSST! HEY, TOMMY!
HEE! HEE!
IT'S CONSIDERED NORMAL IN THIS SOCIETY FOR CHILDREN TO COMBINE WORDS AND PICTURES, SO LONG AS THEY GROW OUT OF IT.
Tommy


TRADITIONAL THINKING HAS LONG HELD THAT TRULY GREAT WORKS OF ART AND LITERATURE ARE ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN THE TWO ARE KEPT AT ARM'S LENGTH.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
HOLY BIBLE
THE THEBAN PLAYS
WAR AND PEACE
TOLSTOY
LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
HARPER LEE

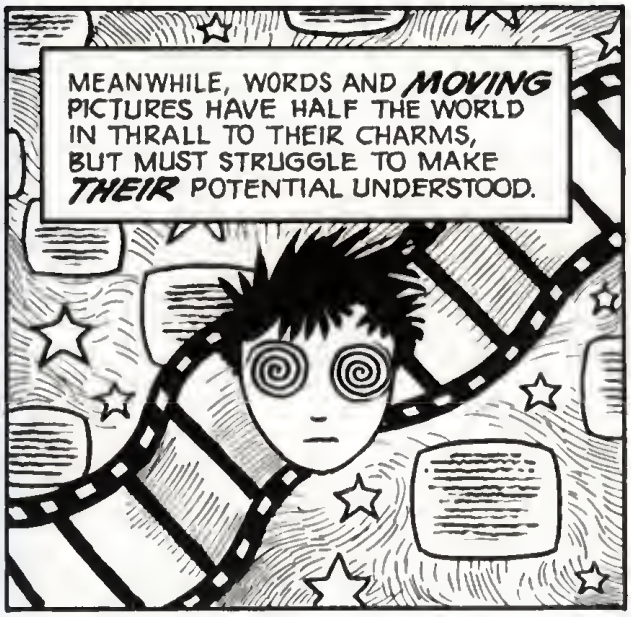

WORDS AND PICTURES TOGETHER ARE CONSIDERED, AT BEST, A DIVERSION FOR THE MASSES, AT WORST A PRODUCT OF CRASS COMMERCIALISM.
Greetings from Hobo
Kool Aid
FTD
Small Dog
BATMAN
BRAWN
People
IT'S OVER
QUICK QUAKER OATS
CAP'N CRUNCH PEANUT BUTTER CRUNCH
ARE YOU HUNGRY TONIGHT?
HOME ALONE
NEWS


AS CHILDREN, OUR FIRST BOOKS HAD PICTURES GALORE AND VERY FEW WORDS BECAUSE THAT WAS "EASIER."
WALLY


THEN, AS WE GREW, WE WERE EXPECTED TO GRADUATE TO BOOKS WITH MUCH MORE TEXT AND ONLY OCCASIONAL PICTURES--


--AND FINALLY TO ARRIVE AT "REAL" BOOKS -- THOSE WITH NO PICTURES AT ALL.

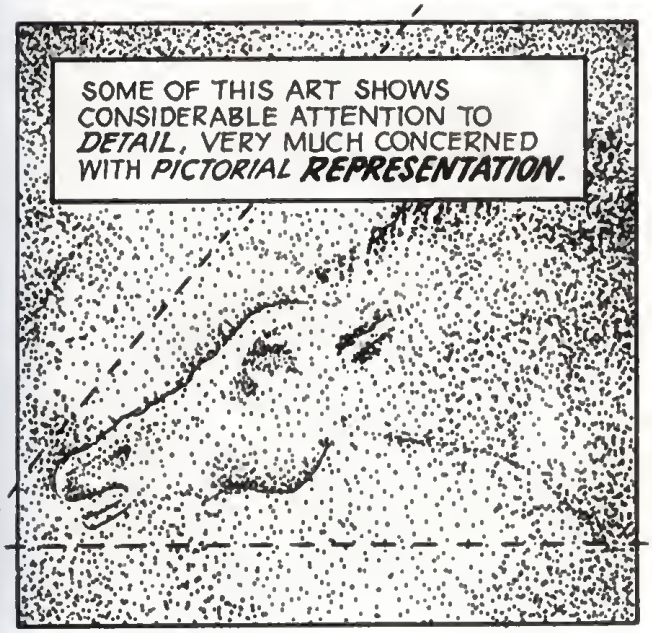

OR PERHAPS, AS IS SADLY THE CASE THESE DAYS, TO NO BOOKS AT ALL.


MEANWHILE, WORDS AND MOVING PICTURES HAVE HALF THE WORLD IN THRALL TO THEIR CHARMS, BUT MUST STRUGGLE TO MAKE THEIR POTENTIAL UNDERSTOOD.

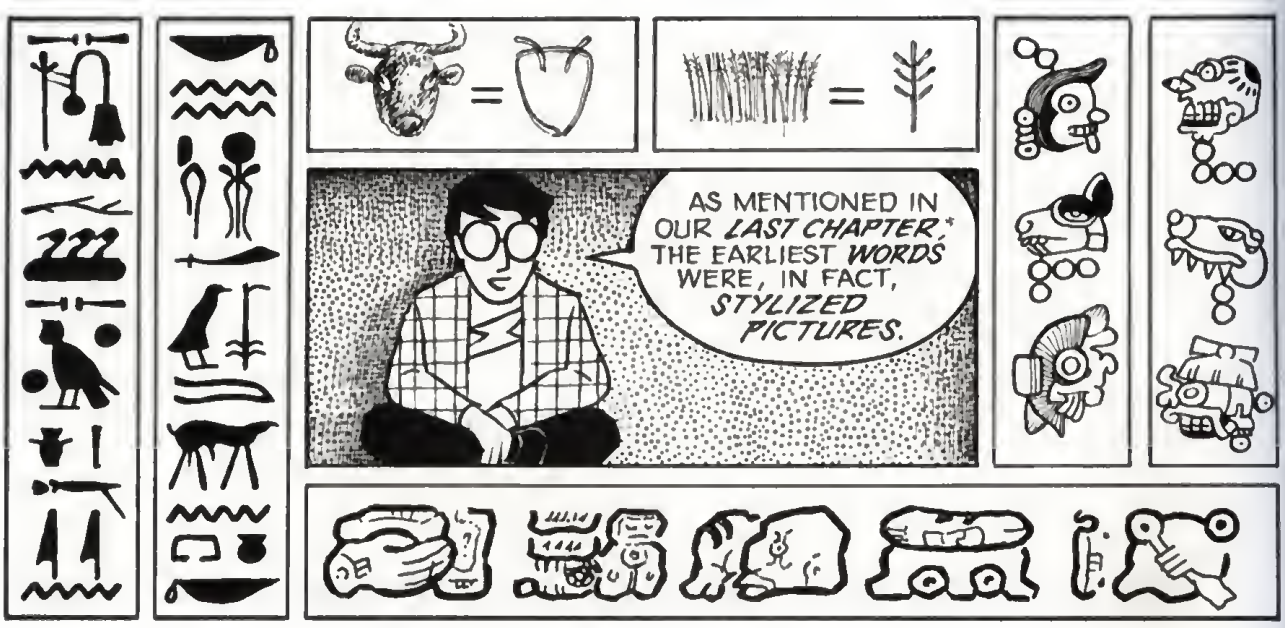

WORDS AND PICTURES ARE AS POPULAR AS EVER, BUT THIS WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THE COMBINATION IS SOMEHOW BASE OR SIMPLISTIC HAS BECOME A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY.
HEY KIDS! COMICS
VOGUE

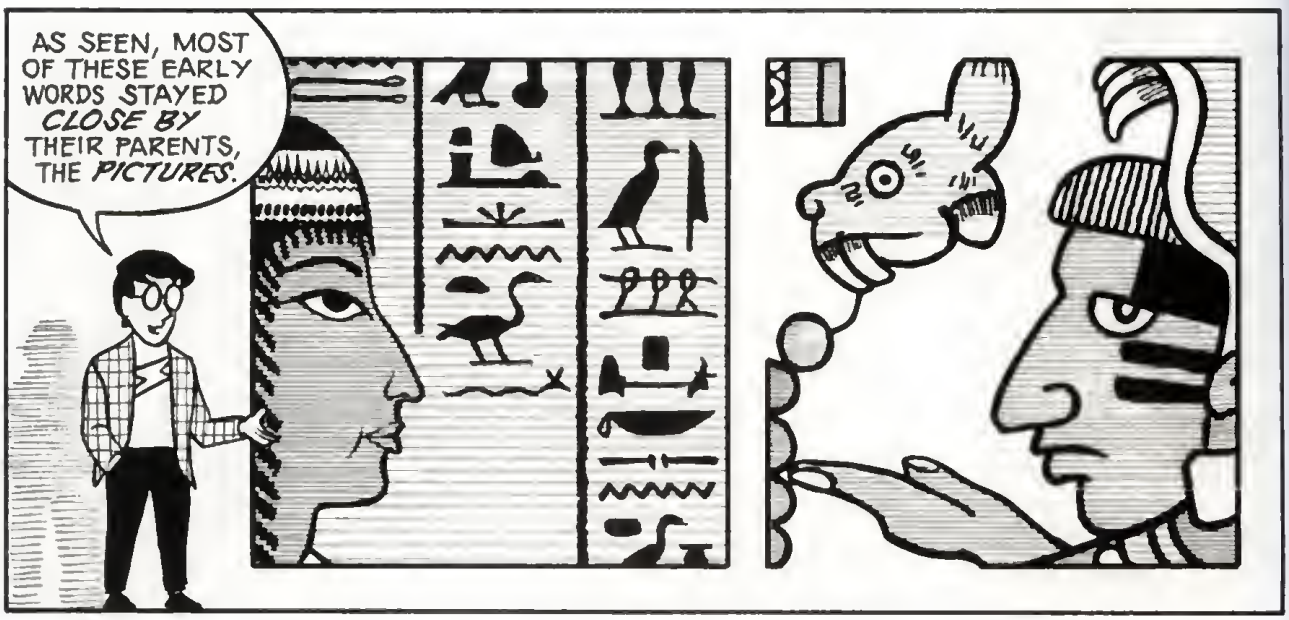

THE ROOTS OF THIS ATTITUDE RUN PRETTY DEEP.
People

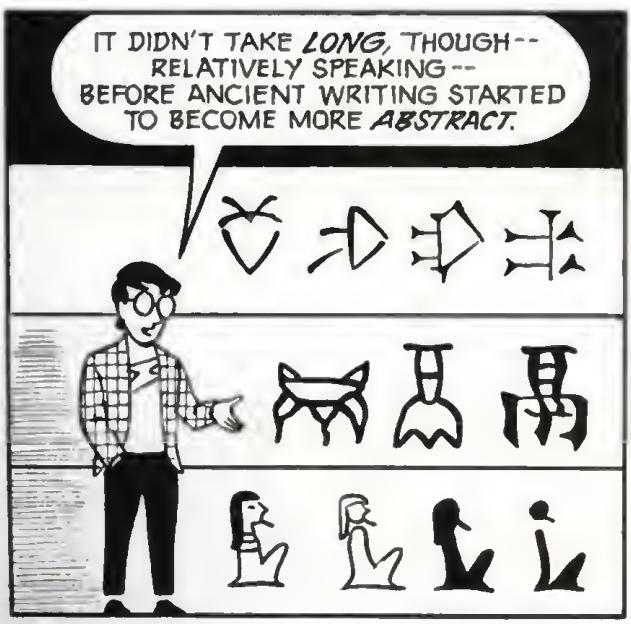

AS NEAR AS WE CAN TELL, PICTURES PREDATE THE WRITTEN WORD BY A LARGE MARGIN. HERE ARE SOME BIG HITS FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF CAVE PAINTING, ABOUT 15,000 YEARS AGO.


SOME OF THIS ART SHOWS CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO DETAIL, VERY MUCH CONCERNED WITH PICTORIAL REPRESENTATION.


BUT OTHERS WERE VERY ICONIC, ACTING AS SYMBOLS RATHER THAN PICTURES -- MORE LIKE A PRIMITIVE LANGUAGE!


AS MENTIONED IN OUR LAST CHAPTER,* THE EARLIEST WORDS WERE, IN FACT, STYLIZED PICTURES.

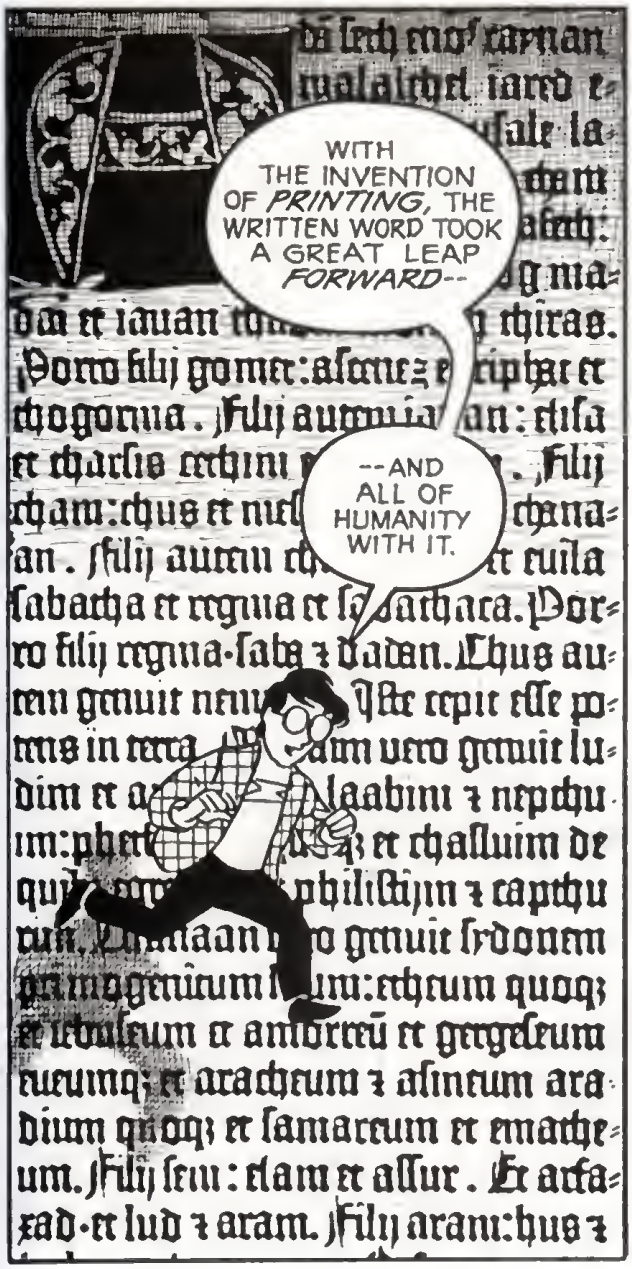

AS SEEN, MOST OF THESE EARLY WORDS STAYED CLOSE BY THEIR PARENTS, THE PICTURES.


IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG, THOUGH-- RELATIVELY SPEAKING-- BEFORE ANCIENT WRITING STARTED TO BECOME MORE ABSTRACT.


SOME WRITTEN LANGUAGES SURVIVE TO THIS DAY, BEARING TRACES OF THEIR ANCIENT PICTORIAL HERITAGE.

* SEE PAGE 129.











*IN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS, FOR EXAMPLE.

MORE *IMPORTANTLY*, WHEN THEY ***WERE*** COMBINED, AS IN THIS *GERMAN* COMIC FROM THE 1400's, WORDS AND PICTURES STAYED *SEPARATE*, REFUSING TO *MIX*-- LIKE *OIL AND WATER*.

THE WRITTEN WORD WAS BECOMING MORE *SPECIALIZED*, MORE *ABSTRACT*, MORE *ELABORATE*--

--AND LESS AND LESS LIKE *PICTURES*.

PICTURES, MEANWHILE, BEGAN TO GROW IN THE *OPPOSITE* DIRECTION: LESS *ABSTRACT* OR *SYMBOLIC*, MORE *REPRESENTATIONAL* AND *SPECIFIC*.

FACSIMILE DETAILS OF PORTRAITS BY DURER (1519) REMBRANDT (1660) DAVID (1788) AND INGRES (1810-15).



John Keats 1819

Ode on a Grecian Urn

1

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

BY THE EARLY 1800's, WESTERN ART AND WRITING HAD DRIFTED ABOUT AS FAR APART AS WAS *POSSIBLE*.

ONE WAS OBSESSED WITH *RESEMBLANCE, LIGHT* AND *COLOR*, ALL THINGS *VISIBLE*...

...THE *OTHER* RICH IN *INVISIBLE* TREASURES, SENSES, EMOTIONS, SPIRITUALITY, PHILOSOPHY...

PICTURES AND WORDS, ONCE *TOGETHER* IN THE CENTER OF OUR ICONIC ABSTRACTION CHART, HAVE AT *THIS* POINT *DRIFTED* TO *OPPOSITE CORNERS*.

FACSIMILE OF JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT'S "A VIEW NEAR VOLTERRA"(1838)

FIRST STANZA OF KEATS' POEM.

IN A WAY, PICTURES AND WORDS HAD REACHED THE END OF A *5,000 YEAR JOURNEY.* IF THEY WERE TO *CONTINUE* MOVING, WHERE COULD THEY GO?

PICTURE PLANE

P

W

RESEMBLANCE

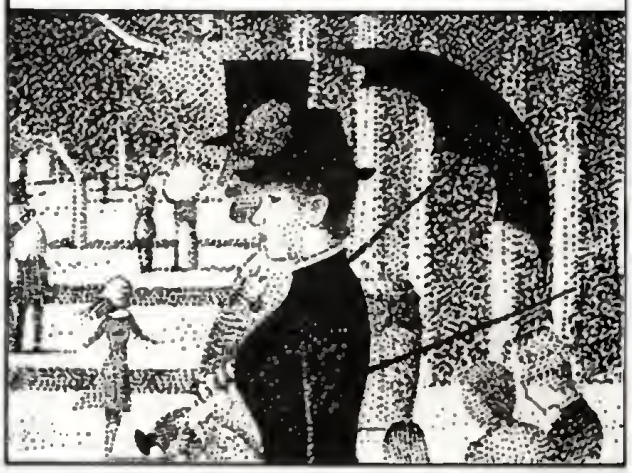
MEANING

FOR *PICTURES,* THERE WAS ONLY *UP!*

IMPRESSIONISM SENT WESTERN ART TOWARD THE *ABSTRACT VERTEX,* BUT IN A WAY THAT *CLUNG* TO WHAT THE *EYE* SAW.

P

IMPRESSIONISM, WHILE IT COULD BE THOUGHT OF AS THE FIRST ***MODERN*** MOVEMENT, WAS MORE A *CULMINATION* OF THE ***OLD,*** THE *ULTIMATE STUDY* OF *LIGHT AND COLOR.*



FACSIMILE DETAL OF "A SUNDAY AFTERNOON ON THE ISLAND OF LA GRANDE JATTE" BY GEORGES SEURAT.

SOON AFTER CAME THE ***EXPLOSION!*** EXPRESSIONISM, FUTURISM, DADA, SURREALISM, FAUVISM, CUBISM, ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM, NEO-PLASTICISM, CONSTRUCTIVISM.

EVERY WHICH WAY BUT ***BACKWARDS!***

P

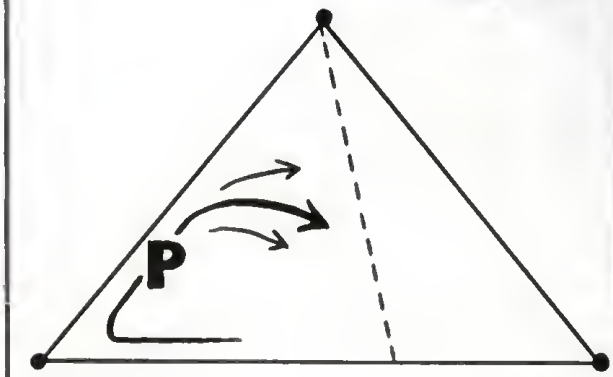
STRICT REPRESENTATIONAL STYLES WERE OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO THE NEW SCHOOLS. *ABSTRACTION,* BOTH ICONIC AND *NON*-ICONIC MADE A SPECTACULAR *COMEBACK!*



FACSIMILE DETAILS OF PORTRAITS BY PICASSO, LEGER AND KLEE.

SOME ARTISTS HEADED *UPWARD* TO THE *SUMMIT* OF THE PICTURE PLANE, WANTING NEITHER *RESEMBLANCE* NOR EXTERNAL *"MEANING."*

BUT THE *MAIN* THRUST WAS A RETURN TO *MEANING* IN ART, *AWAY* FROM RESEMBLANCE, BACK TO THE REALM OF *IDEAS.*



MEANWHILE, THE WRITTEN WORD WAS ALSO CHANGING. POETRY BEGAN *TURNING AWAY* FROM THE ELUSIVE, *TWICE-ABSTRACTED* LANGUAGE OF OLD TOWARD A MORE *DIRECT,* EVEN *COLLOQUIAL,* STYLE.

John Keats 1819

Ode on a Grecian Urn

1

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietuess,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?

Walt Whitman 1890

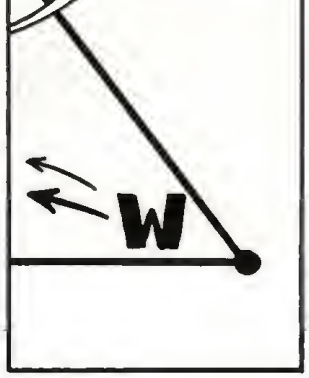
Facing West from California's Shores

Facing west, from California's shores,
inquiring, tireless, seeking
what is yet unfound,
I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the
house of maternity, the
land of migrations, look afar
Look off the shores of my Western sea, the
circle almost circled:
For starting westward from Hindustan,
from the vales of Kashmere, From Asia,
from the north, from the God, the sage,
and the hero, From the south, from the
flowery peninsulas and the spice islands,
Long having wandered since, round the
earth having wandered,
Now I face home again,
very pleased and joyous;
(But where is what I started for,
so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?)

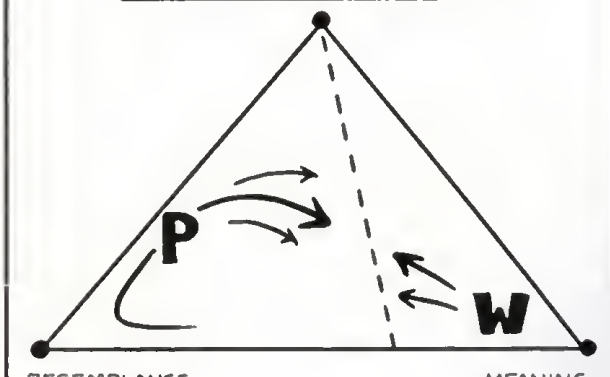
IN PROSE, LANGUAGE WAS BECOMING EVEN MORE DIRECT, CONVEYING MEANING *SIMPLY* AND *QUICKLY,* MORE LIKE *PICTURES.*



"MEANING" WAS NOT *ABANDONED* BY *ANY MEANS,* BUT AUTHORS WERE DEFINITELY MOVING *LEFT--*

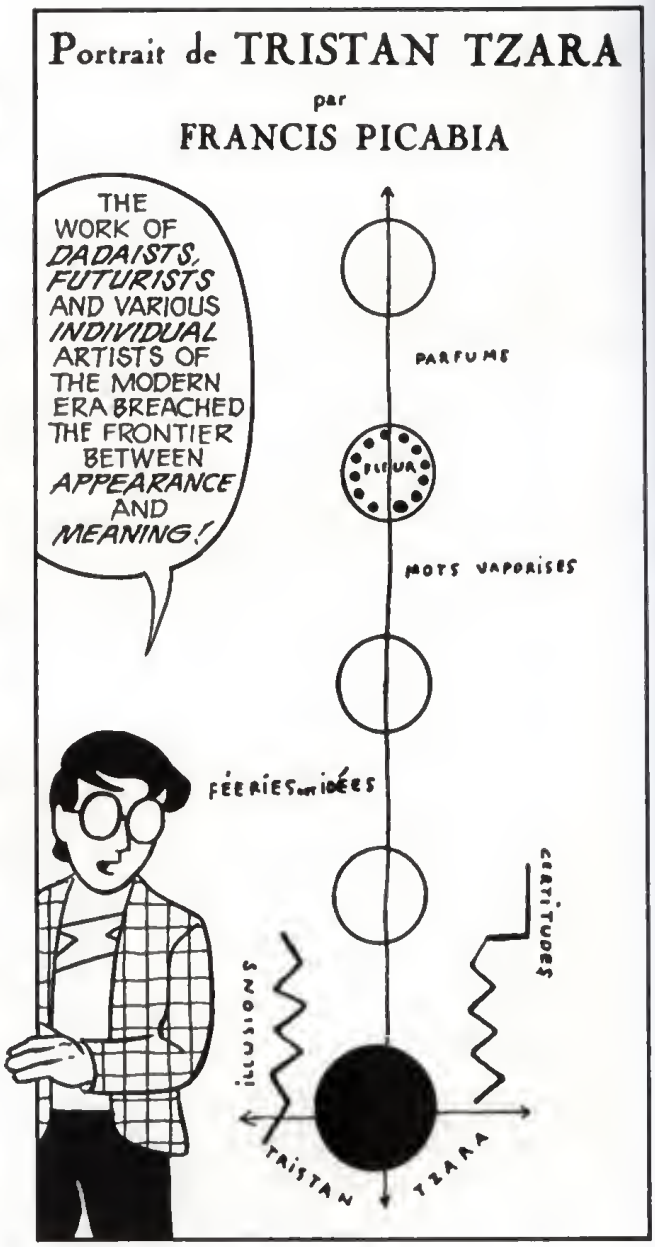


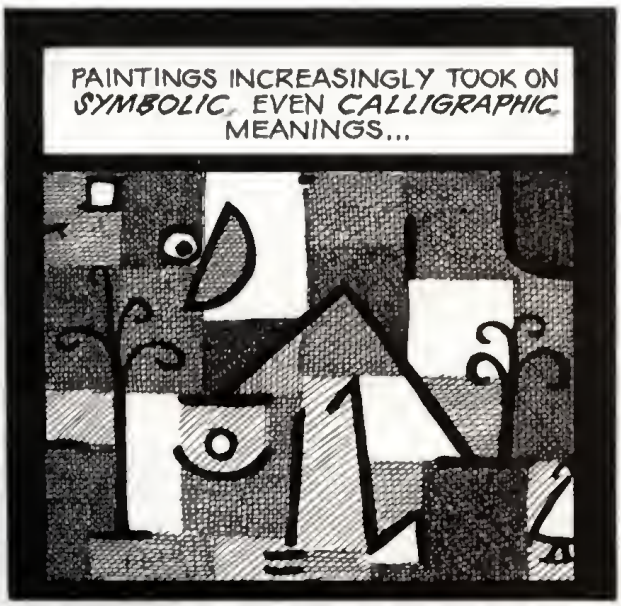
--AND HEADED FOR A *COLLISION!*





DADA POSTER FOR THE PLAY
"THE BEARDED HEART"



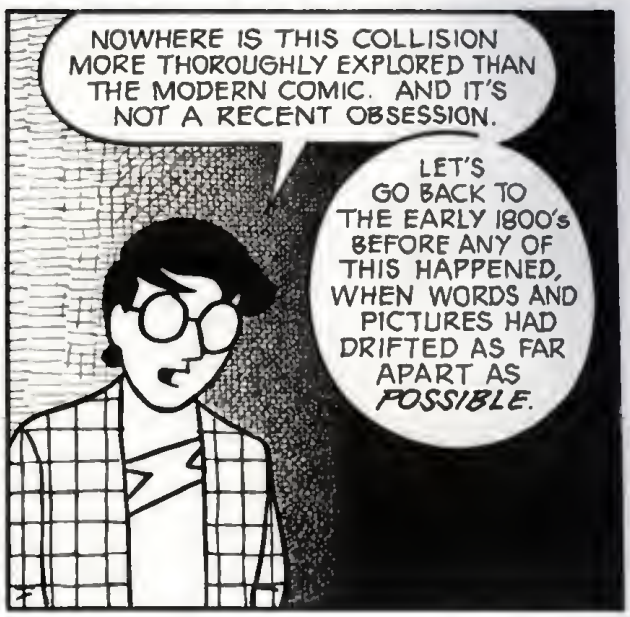


FACSIMILE OF "ORIENTAL SWEETNESS" (1938) BY PAUL KLEE.

WHILE SOME ARTISTS ADDRESSED THE IRONIES OF WORDS AND PICTURES *HEAD-ON!*







UP TO THAT POINT, *EUROPEAN BROADSHEETS* HAD OFFERED *REMINDERS* OF WHAT WORDS AND PICTURES COULD DO WHEN COMBINED.

BUT AGAIN IT WAS *RODOLPHE TÖPFFER* WHO FORESAW THEIR *INTERDEPENDENCY* AND BROUGHT THE FAMILY *BACK TOGETHER* AT LAST.



M. CRÉPIN ADVERTISES FOR A TUTOR, AND MANY APPLY FOR THE JOB.

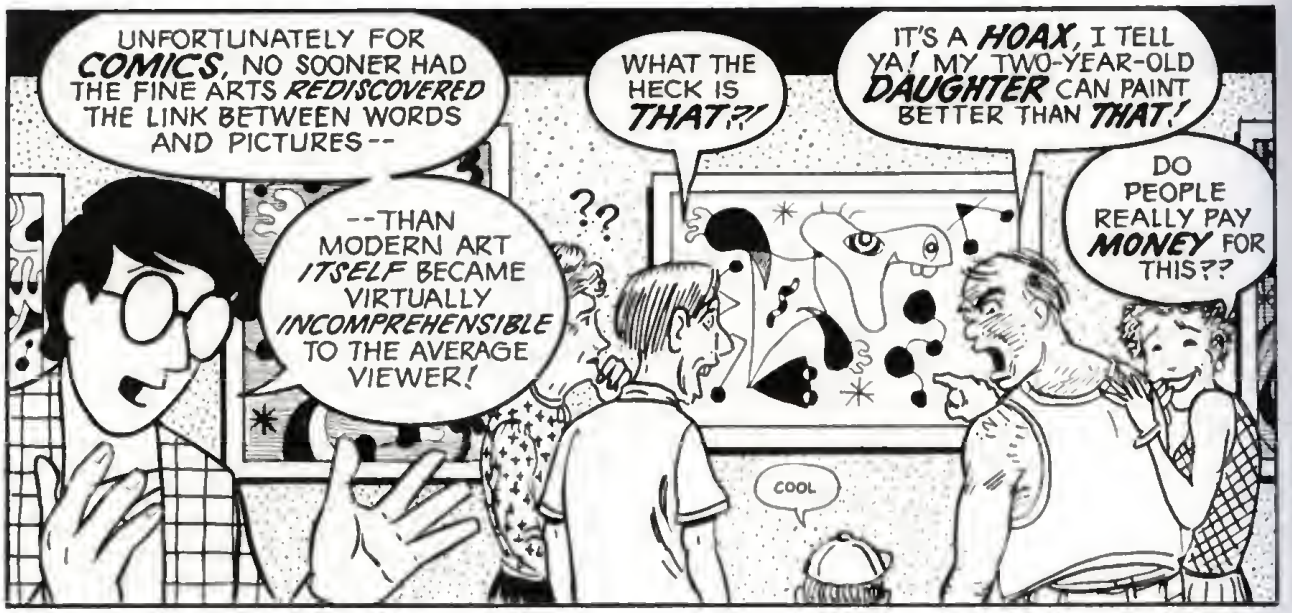
TRANSLATION BY E. WIESE.

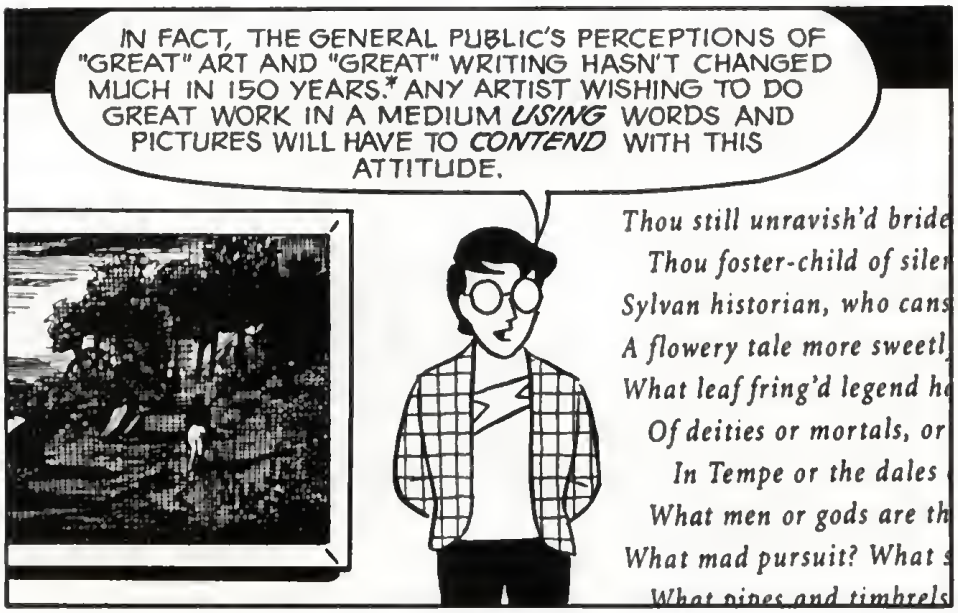




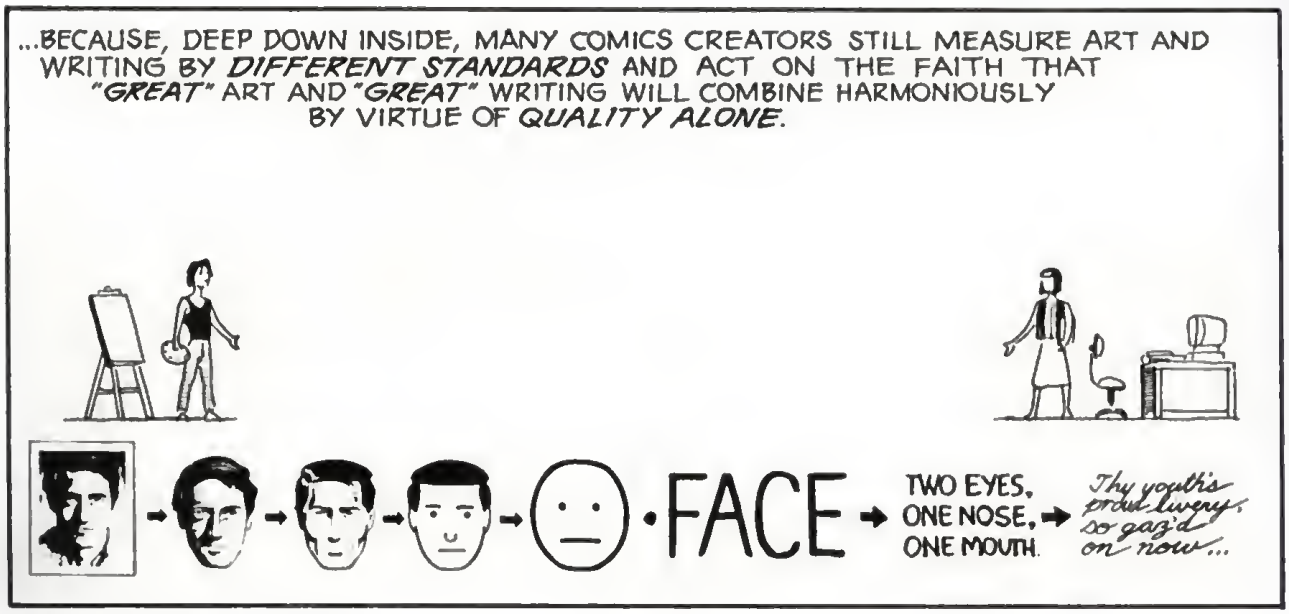




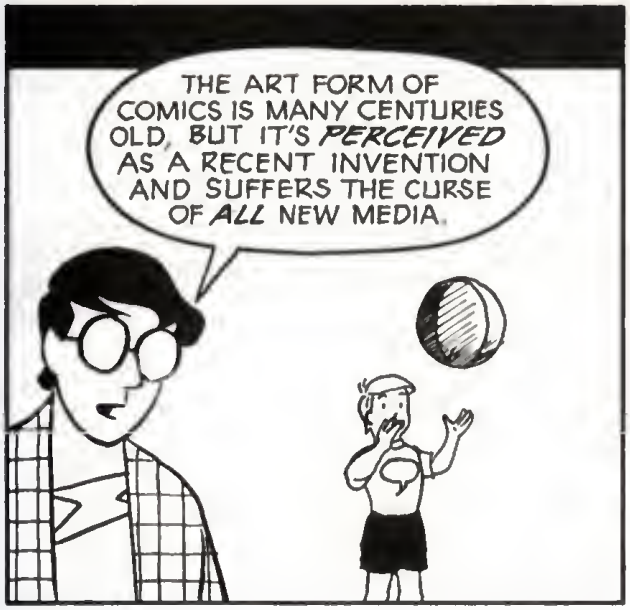


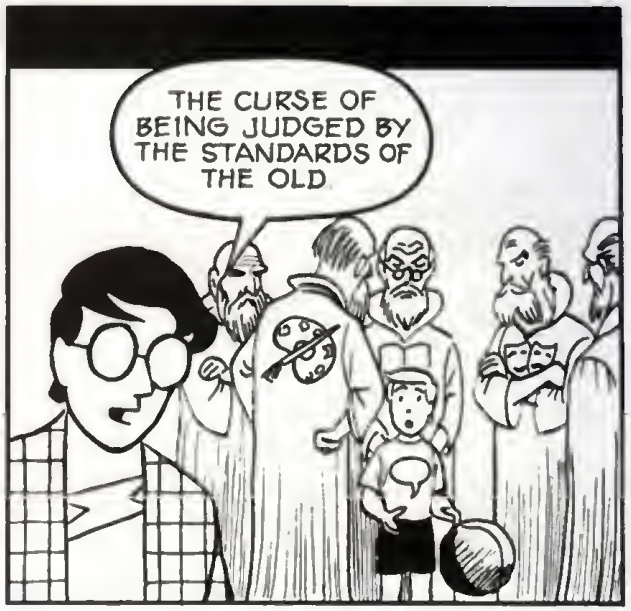


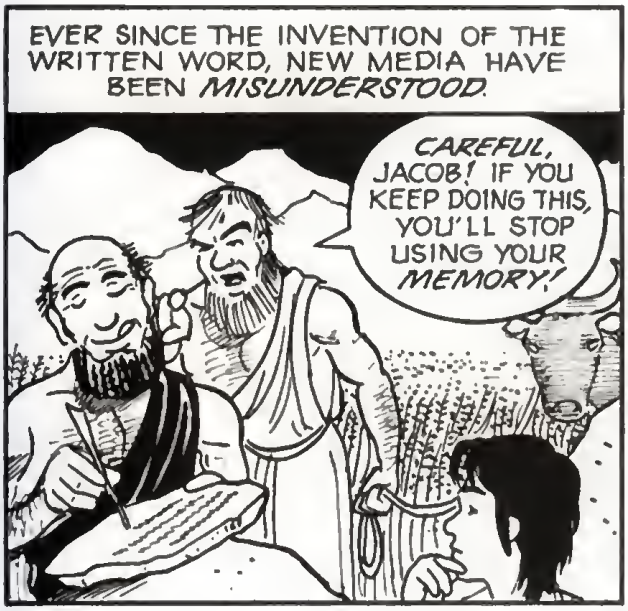


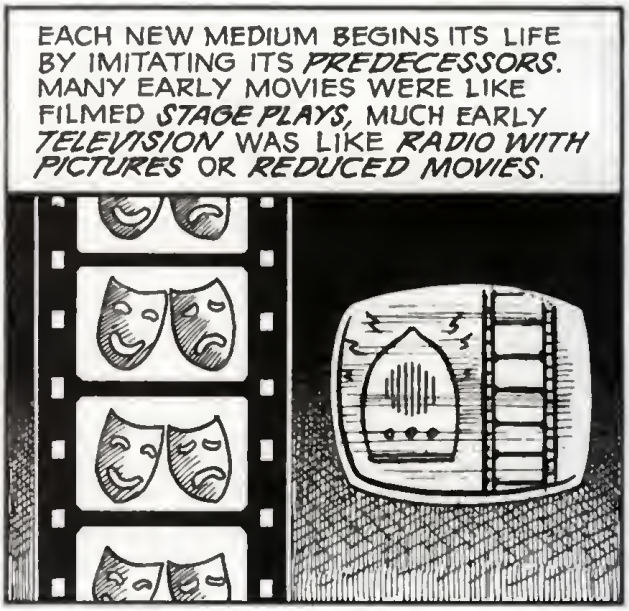


* NOT AS MUCH AS WE LIKE TO *THINK* IT HAS, ANYWAY.


THE ART FORM OF COMICS IS MANY CENTURIES OLD, BUT IT'S *PERCEIVED* AS A RECENT INVENTION AND SUFFERS THE CURSE OF *ALL* NEW MEDIA.


THE CURSE OF BEING JUDGED BY THE STANDARDS OF THE OLD


EVER SINCE THE INVENTION OF THE WRITTEN WORD, NEW MEDIA HAVE BEEN *MISUNDERSTOOD*.
CAREFUL, JACOB! IF YOU KEEP DOING THIS, YOU'LL STOP USING YOUR *MEMORY!*

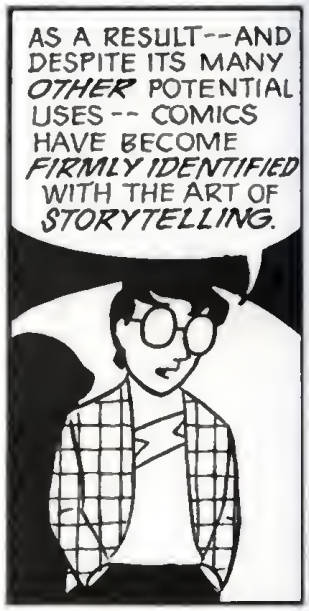

EACH NEW MEDIUM BEGINS ITS LIFE BY IMITATING ITS *PREDECESSORS*. MANY EARLY MOVIES WERE LIKE FILMED *STAGE PLAYS*, MUCH EARLY *TELEVISION* WAS LIKE *RADIO WITH PICTURES* OR *REDUCED MOVIES*.

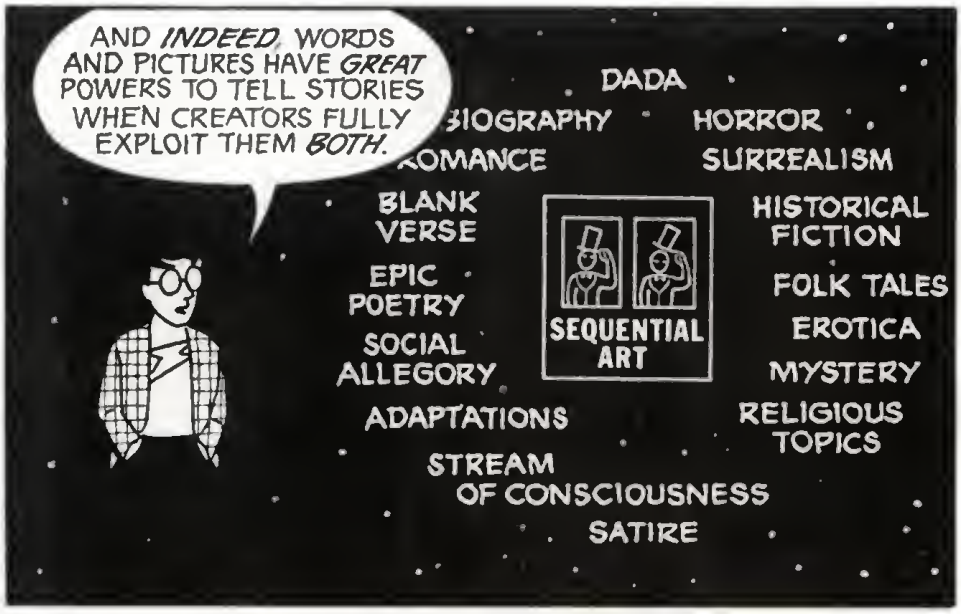

FAR TOO MANY COMICS CREATORS HAVE NO HIGHER GOAL THAN TO MATCH THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OTHER MEDIA, AND VIEW ANY CHANCE TO *WORK* IN OTHER MEDIA AS A *STEP UP*.


AND *AGAIN*, AS LONG AS WE VIEW COMICS AS A *GENRE* OF WRITING OR A *STYLE* OF GRAPHIC ART THIS ATTITUDE MAY *NEVER* DISAPPEAR.


WORDS AND PICTURES IN COMBINATION MAY NOT BE MY *DEFINITION* OF COMICS, BUT THE COMBINATION HAS HAD *TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE* ON ITS *GROWTH*.
com·ics (kom'iks) **n.**


A HUGE RANGE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCES CAN BE *PORTRAYED* IN COMICS THROUGH EITHER WORDS OR PICTURES.


AS A RESULT--AND DESPITE ITS MANY *OTHER* POTENTIAL USES -- COMICS HAVE BECOME *FIRMLY IDENTIFIED* WITH THE ART OF *STORYTELLING*.


AND *INDEED*, WORDS AND PICTURES HAVE *GREAT* POWERS TO TELL STORIES WHEN CREATORS FULLY EXPLOIT THEM *BOTH*.
DADA
BIOGRAPHY
HORROR
ROMANCE
SURREALISM
BLANK VERSE
HISTORICAL FICTION
EPIC POETRY
FOLK TALES
SEQUENTIAL ART
EROTICA
SOCIAL ALLEGORY
MYSTERY
ADAPTATIONS
RELIGIOUS TOPICS
STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SATIRE


AND SO FAR, WE'VE ONLY SEEN THE *TIP OF THE ICEBERG!*


AS CHILDREN, WE "SHOW AND TELL" *INTERCHANGEABLY*, WORDS AND IMAGES COMBINING TO TRANSMIT A *CONNECTED SERIES OF IDEAS*.
IT'S GOT ONE OF *THESE* THINGS


THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH WORDS AND PICTURES CAN *COMBINE* IN COMICS IS VIRTUALLY *UNLIMITED*.


BUT LET'S TRY TO BREAK IT DOWN INTO SOME DISTINCT *CATEGORIES*.


FIRST, WE HAVE THE WORD SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS, WHERE PICTURES ILLUSTRATE, BUT DON'T SIGNIFICANTLY ADD TO A LARGELY COMPLETE TEXT.
WE STUMBLED BACK TO THE APARTMENT SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN, VOMITING EVERY 20 YARDS.
JUDY GAVE ME HER KEYS AND SMILED.
THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION WAS ADOPTED BY THE SECOND CONTINENTAL CONGRESS IN 1787 AND PUT INTO EFFECT IN 1789.
THEN THERE ARE PICTURE SPECIFIC COMBINATIONS WHERE WORDS DO LITTLE MORE THAN ADD A SOUNDTRACK TO A VISUALLY TOLD SEQUENCE.
HE DID IT!
MMM...
MMM...
AND, OF COURSE, DUO-SPECIFIC PANELS IN WHICH BOTH WORDS AND PICTURES SEND ESSENTIALLY THE SAME MESSAGE.
GRIM-FACED, GEORGE LIFTED HIS LOLLYPOP.
BUT THE CAPTAIN'S MIGHTY BLOW MISSES ITS INTENDED TARGET!
BLAST! HE DODGED MY PUNCH AND I STRUCK THIS BRICK WALL!
HA! I DODGED YO
I FEEL SO SAD!
...THOUGHT AMY.


ANOTHER TYPE IS THE ADDITIVE COMBINATION WHERE WORDS AMPLIFY OR ELABORATE ON AN IMAGE OR VICE VERSA.
HOW D'YA LIKE MY NEW THREADS, BABE?
MY HEAD FEELS LIKE A SMASHED PUMPKIN!
IS THIS THE SAME JUPITER OF MY YOUTH?
IN PARALLEL COMBINATIONS, WORDS AND PICTURES SEEM TO FOLLOW VERY DIFFERENT COURSES--WITHOUT INTERSECTING.
"TALKED TO BILL YET?"
"SALLY DID. WHY?"
"THE TEST RESULTS CAME BACK. ALL NEGATIVE."
"REALLY? THAT'S GREAT!"
WELL...
PEPPER.
CEREAL.
MILK.
BUTTER.
LIGHT BULBS.
STILL ANOTHER OPTION IS THE MONTAGE WHERE WORDS ARE TREATED AS INTEGRAL PARTS OF THE PICTURE.
CASH FLOW
BOTTOM LINE
ANNUAL REPORT
HAPPY!

PERHAPS THE MOST *COMMON* TYPE OF WORD/PICTURE COMBINATION IS THE ***INTER-DEPENDENT,*** WHERE WORDS AND PICTURES GO ***HAND IN HAND*** TO CONVEY AN IDEA THAT NEITHER COULD CONVEY ***ALONE.***



MEANWHILE...

DID ANYONE *SEE* YOU?



THIS IS ALL I NEED TO *STOP HIM!*



I ASK YOU, DOES THIS GUY LOOK LIKE A *C.E.O.* TO *YOU?!*



"AND JUST ***GUESS*** WHO DROVE UP IN BOB'S TRUCK AN HOUR LATER!"



"AFTER COLLEGE, I PURSUED A CAREER IN *HIGH FINANCE.*"



HE'S LYING.

UH-HUH.



INTERDEPENDENT COMBINATIONS AREN'T ALWAYS AN *EQUAL BALANCE* THOUGH AND MAY FALL *ANYWHERE* ON A SCALE BETWEEN TYPES ONE AND TWO.

P

W



GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE MORE IS SAID WITH ***WORDS,*** THE MORE THE PICTURES CAN BE FREED TO GO EXPLORING AND *VICE VERSA.*

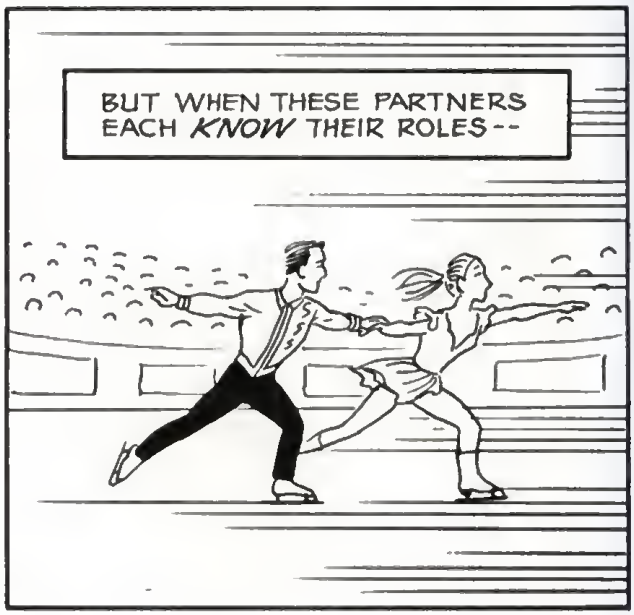
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P


IN COMICS AT ITS *BEST*, WORDS AND PICTURES ARE LIKE *PARTNERS* IN A *DANCE* AND EACH ONE TAKES TURNS *LEADING*.

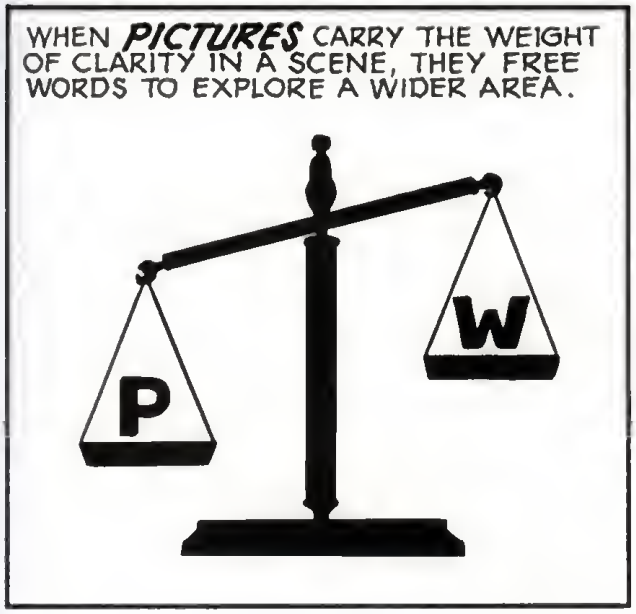

WHEN *BOTH* PARTNERS TRY TO LEAD THE COMPETITION CAN *SUBVERT* THE OVERALL GOALS...
YOW!


...THOUGH A LITTLE *PLAYFUL COMPETITION* CAN SOMETIMES PRODUCE *ENJOYABLE RESULTS*.

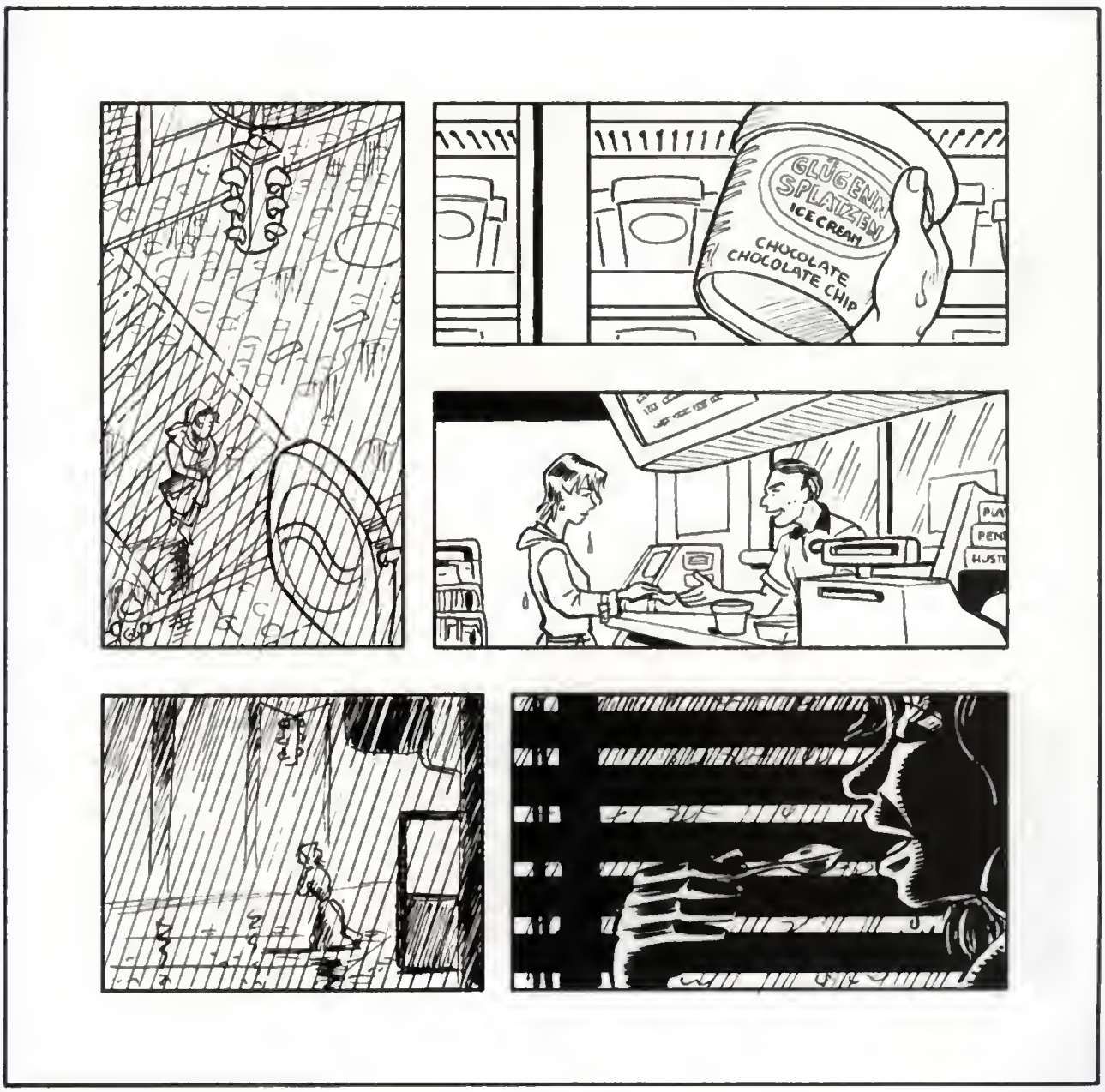

BUT WHEN THESE PARTNERS EACH *KNOW* THEIR ROLES--

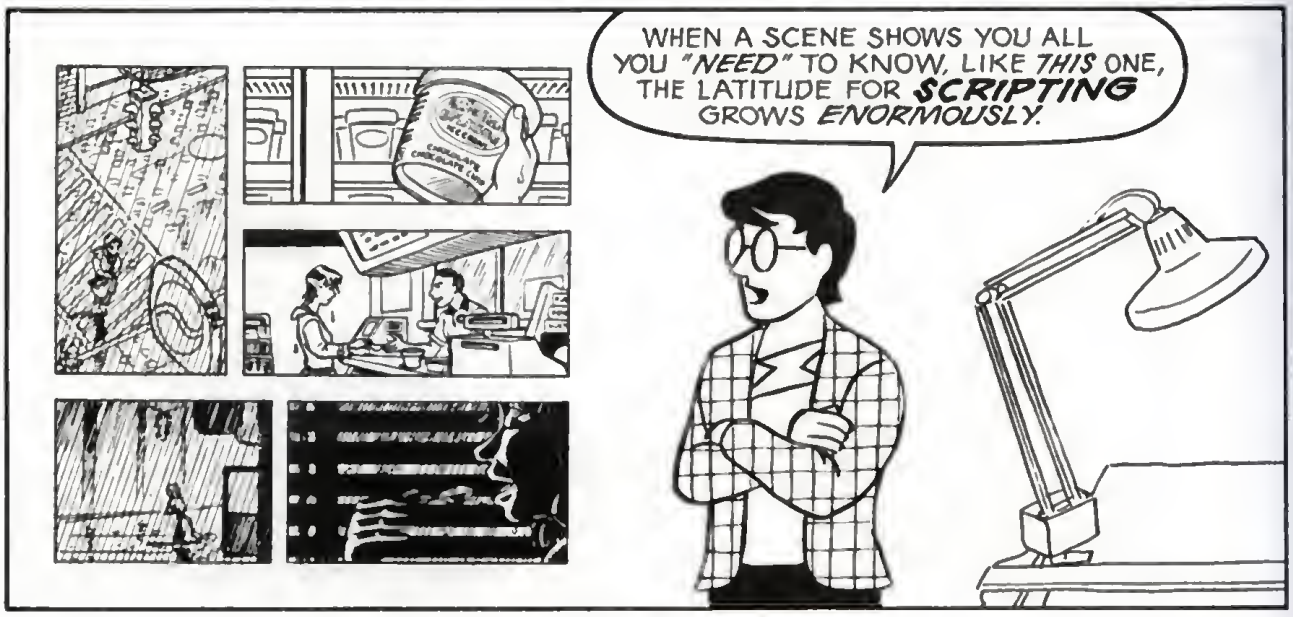

--AND *SUPPORT* EACH OTHER'S *STRENGTHS*--

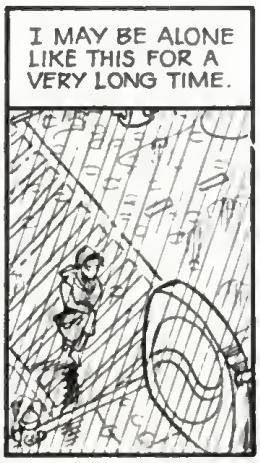

--COMICS CAN MATCH *ANY* OF THE ART FORMS IT DRAWS SO MUCH OF ITS STRENGTH FROM.


WHEN PICTURES CARRY THE WEIGHT OF CLARITY IN A SCENE, THEY FREE WORDS TO EXPLORE A WIDER AREA.
P
W


LET'S SAY I SHOW YOU A WOMAN WALKING ACROSS THE STREET IN THE RAIN, BUYING A PINT OF ICE CREAM AND EATING IT IN HER APARTMENT--
--ALL IN PICTURES.


GLÜGENN SPLATZEN
ICE CREAM
CHOCOLATE CHOCOLATE CHIP





IT COULD BECOME AN *INTERNAL MONOLOGUE.*

(INTERDEPENDENT)

PERHAPS SOMETHING WILDLY *INCONGRUOUS*



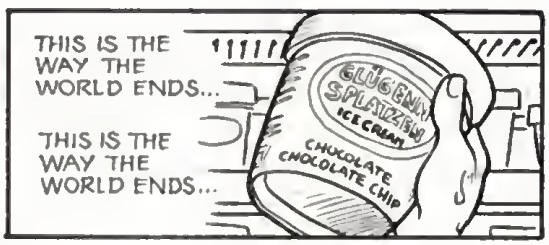
(PARALLEL)

MAYBE IT'S ALL JUST A BIG *ADVERTISEMENT!*



(INTERDEPENDENT)

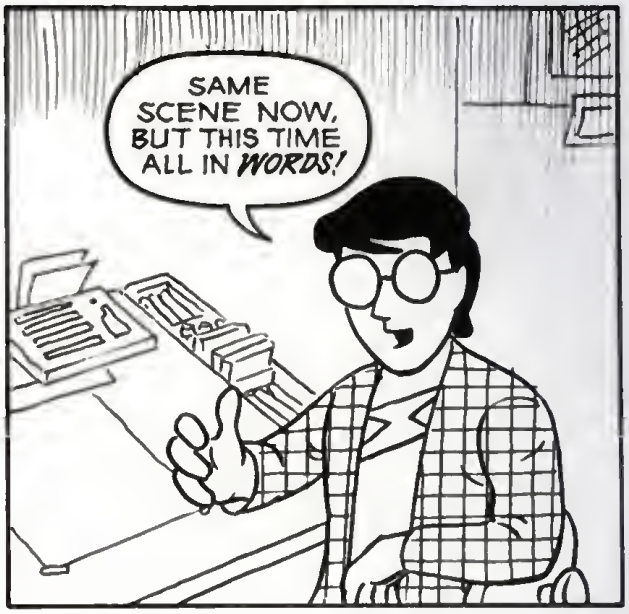
OR A CHANCE TO RUMINATE ON *BROADER TOPICS.*



(INTERDEPENDENT)

ON THE *OTHER* HAND, IF THE ***WORDS*** LOCK IN THE *"MEANING"* OF A SEQUENCE, THEN THE *PICTURES* CAN REALLY TAKE OFF.





I CROSSED THE STREET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE. THE RAIN SOAKED INTO MY BOOTS.

I FOUND THE LAST PINT OF CHOCOLATE CHOCOLATE CHIP IN THE FREEZER.

THE CLERK TRIED TO PICK ME UP. I SAID *NO THANKS*. HE GAVE ME THIS CREEPY LOOK...

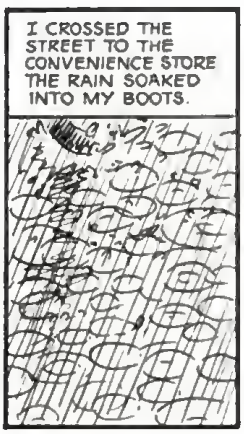
I WENT BACK TO THE APARTMENT--

--AND FINISHED IT ALL IN AN HOUR.

ALONE AT LAST.







IF THE ARTIST WANTS TO, HE/SHE CAN NOW SHOW ONLY *FRAGMENTS* OF A SCENE.

(WORD SPECIFIC)

OR MOVE TOWARD GREATER LEVELS OF *ABSTRACTION* OR *EXPRESSION*.



(AMPLIFICATION)

PERHAPS THE ARTIST CAN GIVE US SOME IMPORTANT *EMOTIONAL* INFORMATION.

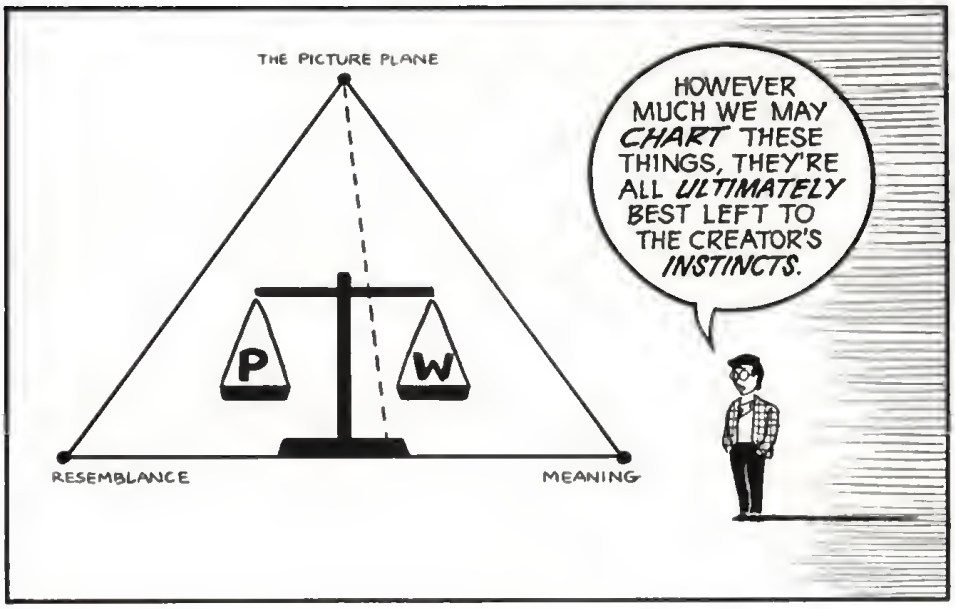


(INTERDEPENDENT)

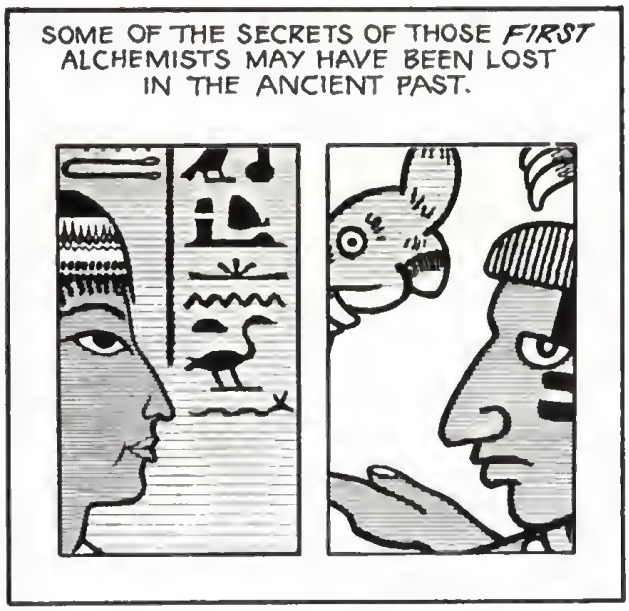
OR SHIFT AHEAD OR BACKWARDS IN TIME.

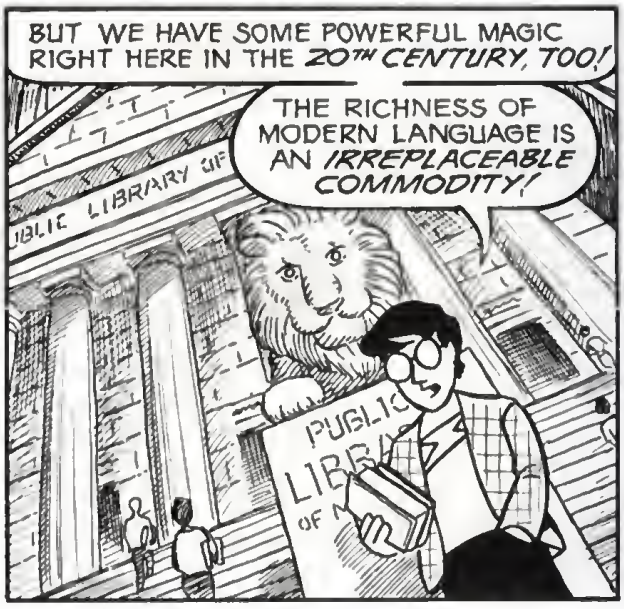


(WORD SPECIFIC)


THE PICTURE PLANE
P
W
RESEMBLANCE
MEANING
HOWEVER MUCH WE MAY CHART THESE THINGS, THEY'RE ALL ULTIMATELY BEST LEFT TO THE CREATOR'S INSTINCTS.

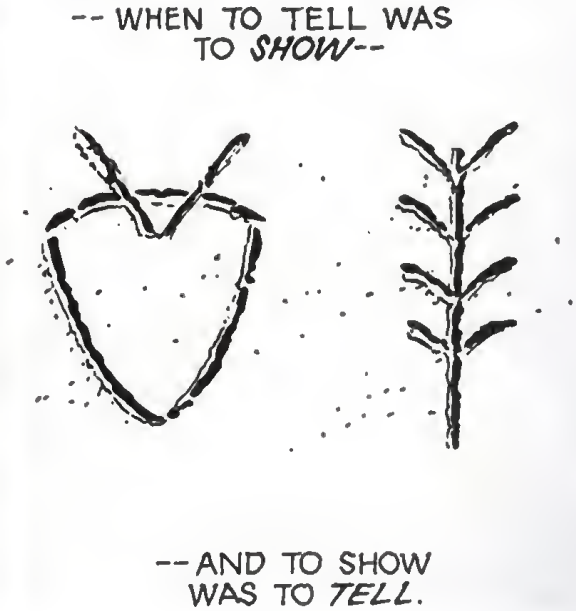

THE MIXING OF WORDS AND PICTURES IS MORE ALCHEMY THAN SCIENCE.


SOME OF THE SECRETS OF THOSE FIRST ALCHEMISTS MAY HAVE BEEN LOST IN THE ANCIENT PAST.


BUT WE HAVE SOME POWERFUL MAGIC RIGHT HERE IN THE 20TH CENTURY, TOO!
THE RICHNESS OF MODERN LANGUAGE IS AN IRREPLACEABLE COMMODITY!

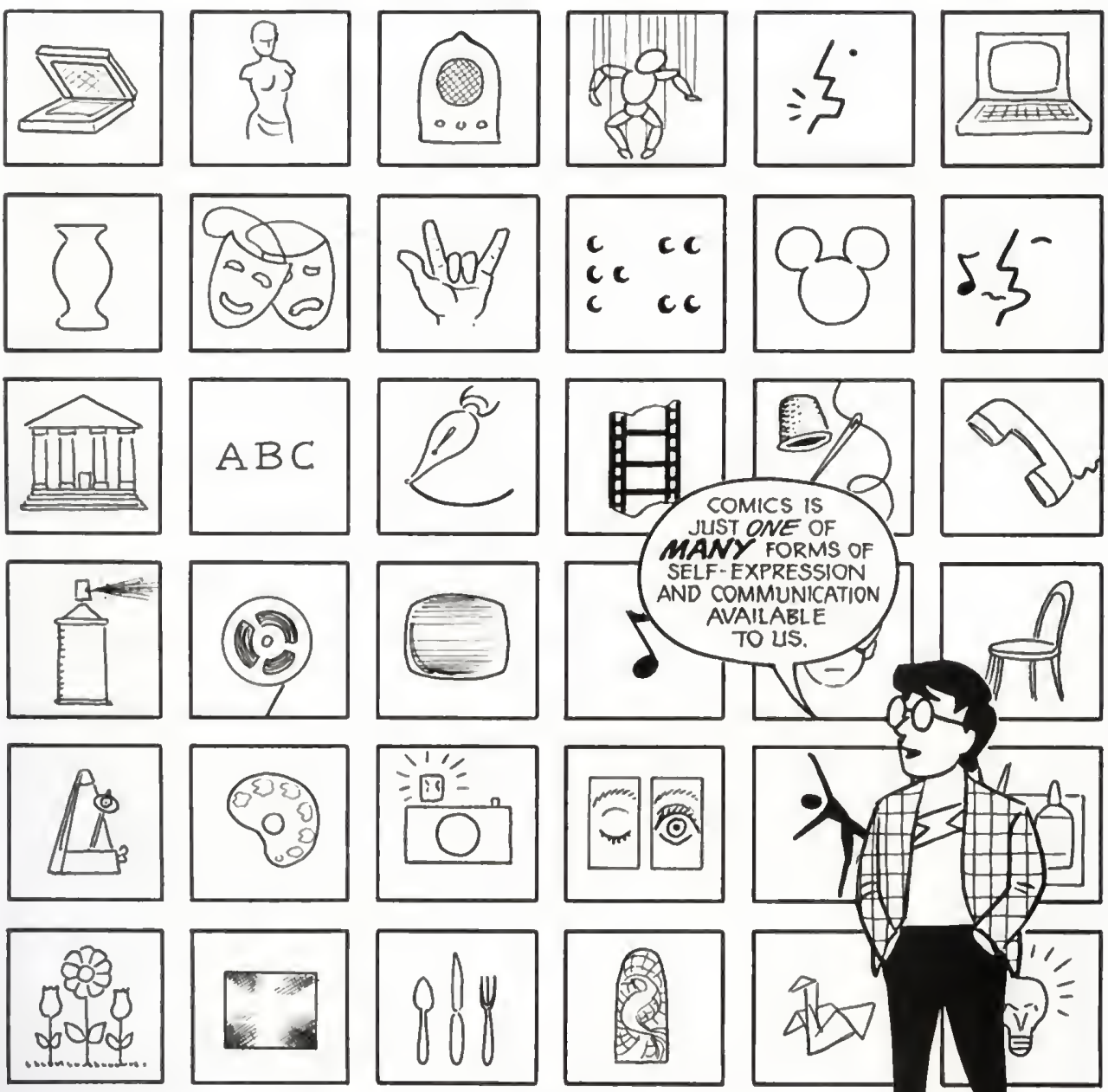

THIS IS AN EXCITING TIME TO BE MAKING COMICS, AND IN MANY WAYS I FEEL VERY LUCKY TO HAVE BEEN BORN WHEN I WAS.


STILL, I DO FEEL A CERTAIN VAGUE LONGING FOR THAT TIME OVER 50 CENTURIES AGO--


-- WHEN TO TELL WAS TO SHOW--
--AND TO SHOW WAS TO TELL.

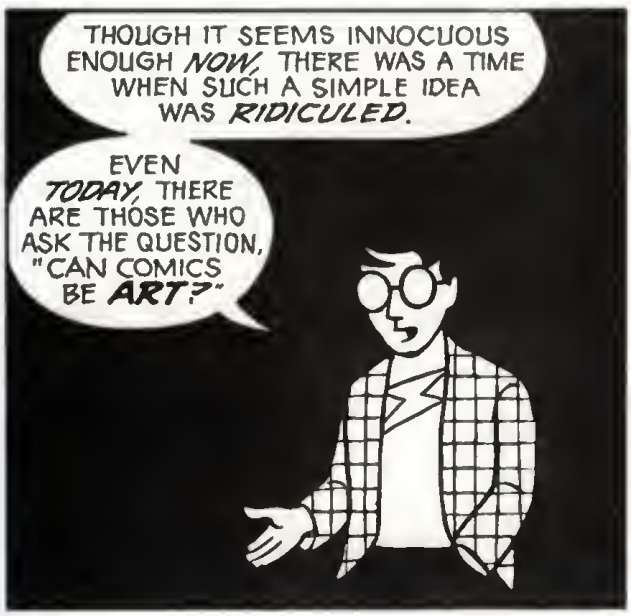
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SIX STEPS.




SO FAR, WE'VE MOSTLY DEALT WITH THE UNIQUE PROPERTIES OF COMICS.


BUT THERE ARE PROPERTIES THAT COMICS SHARE WITH ALL OTHER ART FORMS.
ABC

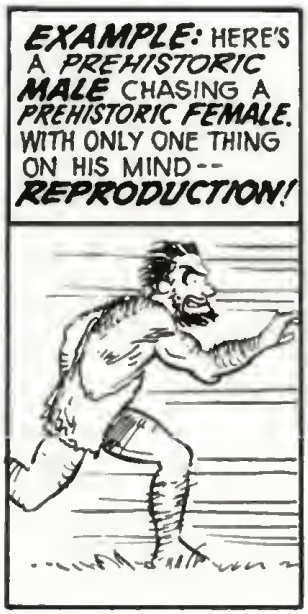

THOUGH IT SEEMS INNOCUOUS ENOUGH NOW, THERE WAS A TIME WHEN SUCH A SIMPLE IDEA WAS RIDICULED.
EVEN TODAY, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ASK THE QUESTION, "CAN COMICS BE ART?"


IT IS--
--I'M SORRY--
A REALLY STUPID QUESTION!

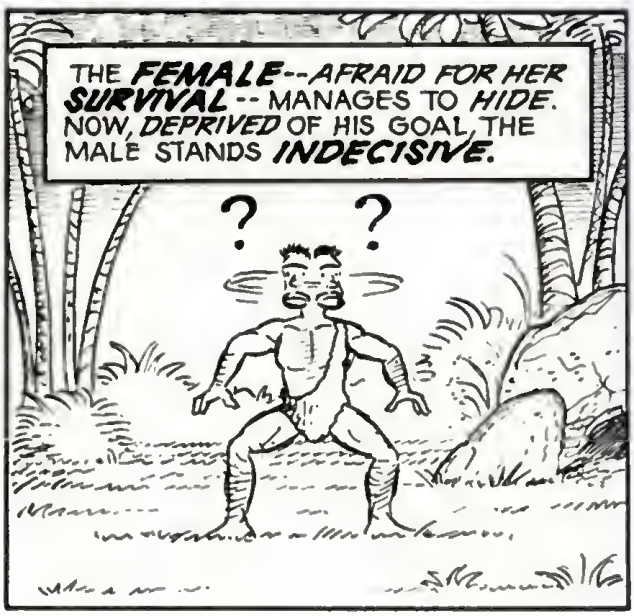

BUT IF WE MUST ANSWER IT, THE ANSWER IS YES.


ESPECIALLY IF YOUR DEFINITION OF ART IS AS BROAD AS MINE!


ART, AS I SEE IT, IS ANY HUMAN ACTIVITY WHICH DOESN'T GROW OUT OF EITHER OF OUR SPECIES' TWO BASIC INSTINCTS: SURVIVAL AND REPRODUCTION!
GRAAH!
EEEK!!


EXAMPLE: HERE'S A PREHISTORIC MALE CHASING A PREHISTORIC FEMALE. WITH ONLY ONE THING ON HIS MIND-- REPRODUCTION!

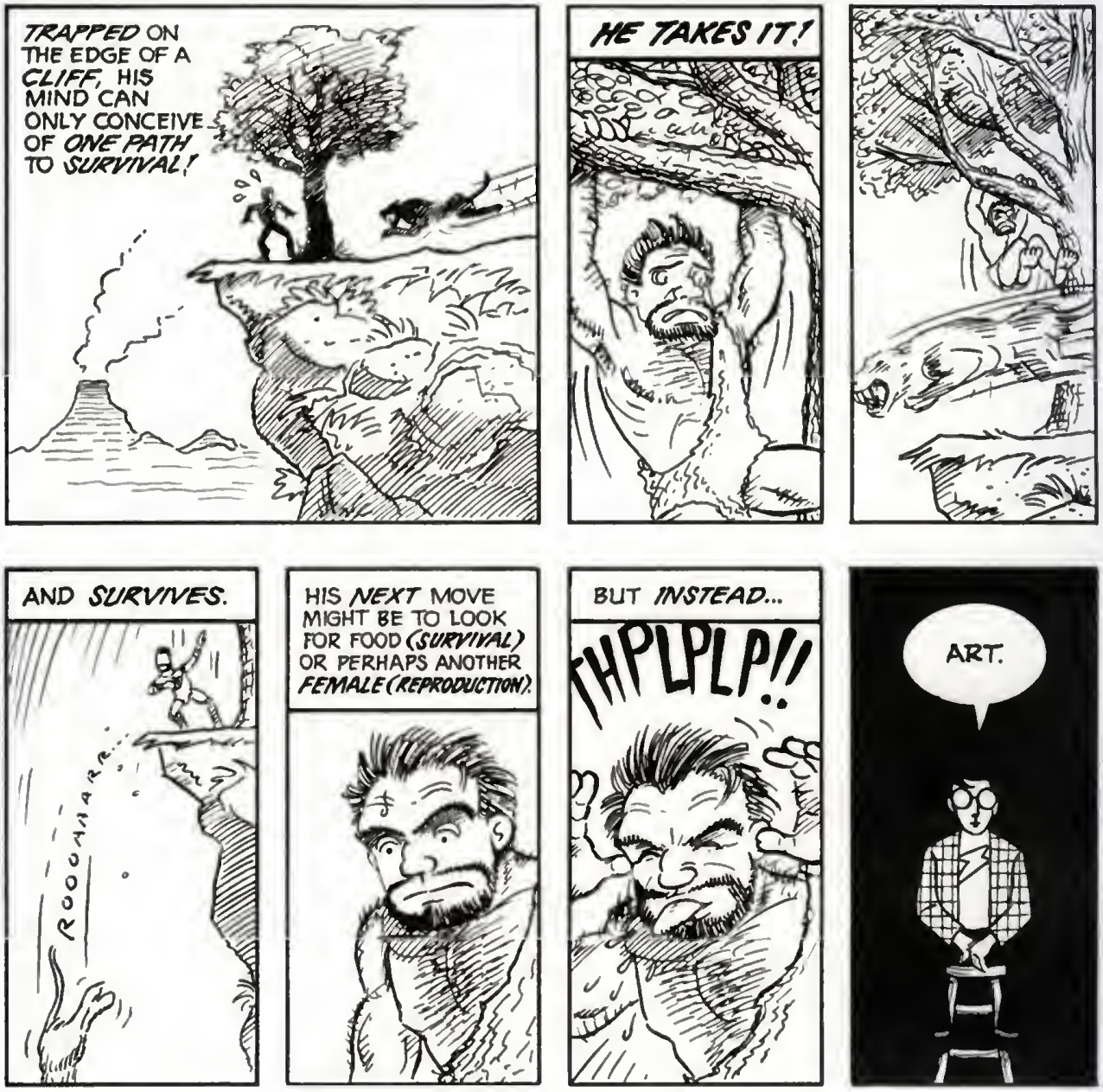

SO STRONG IS THIS INSTINCT THAT IT GOVERNS HIS EVERY MOVE! NOT ONE STEP IS WASTED IN THE PURSUIT OF HIS GOAL!

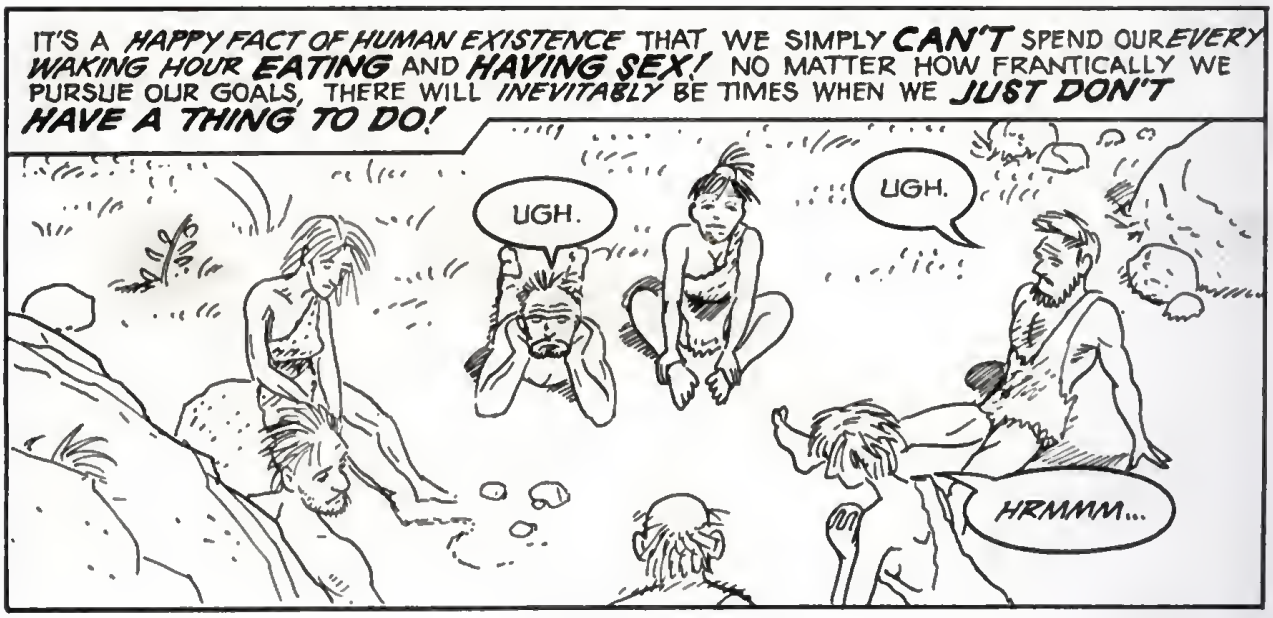

THE FEMALE--AFRAID FOR HER SURVIVAL -- MANAGES TO HIDE. NOW, DEPRIVED OF HIS GOAL, THE MALE STANDS INDECISIVE.
? ?

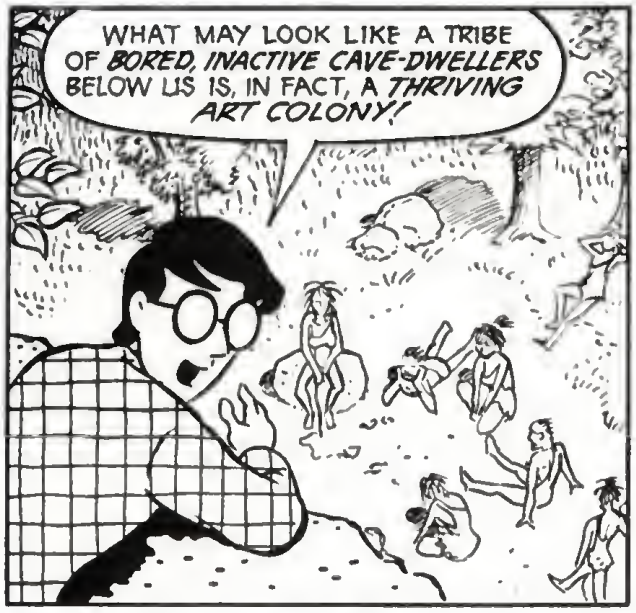

SUDDENLY--!
ROAR!!!


NOW ALL OF HIS THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS ARE FOCUSED ON THAT OTHER VITAL HUMAN INSTINCT-- SURVIVAL!

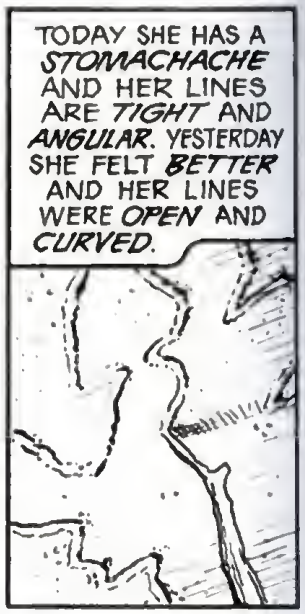

AGAIN HIS LEGS PROPEL HIM FORWARD WITH MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY!


TRAPPED ON THE EDGE OF A CLIFF, HIS MIND CAN ONLY CONCEIVE OF ONE PATH TO SURVIVAL!
HE TAKES IT!
AND SURVIVES.
ROOOAAARR
HIS NEXT MOVE MIGHT BE TO LOOK FOR FOOD (SURVIVAL) OR PERHAPS ANOTHER FEMALE (REPRODUCTION).
BUT INSTEAD...
THPLPLP!!
ART.


IT'S A HAPPY FACT OF HUMAN EXISTENCE THAT WE SIMPLY CAN'T SPEND OUR EVERY WAKING HOUR EATING AND HAVING SEX! NO MATTER HOW FRANTICALLY WE PURSUE OUR GOALS, THERE WILL INEVITABLY BE TIMES WHEN WE JUST DON'T HAVE A THING TO DO!
UGH.
UGH.
HRMMM...














WHILE OVER *HERE,* A LITTLE GIRL *SINGS HER SONG OF YOUTH!*
DOOO







* ALONG WITH THEIR MANY RELATED FEELINGS AND CUSTOMS.


YET IN ALMOST EVERYTHING WE DO THERE IS AT LEAST AN ELEMENT OF ART.
PERHAPS A LITTLE UNNECESSARY CHOREOGRAPHY ON THE ASSEMBLY LINE.
OOOH, BEHBEE!
OR THE PERSONAL STYLE OF A BICYCLE MESSENGER.
HONK! HONK!
OR JUST THE WAY WE SIGN OUR NAMES!
IN SOME OCCUPATIONS, THE LATITUDE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION IS GREATER. SURVIVAL--MAKING A LIVING--GOES HAND IN HAND WITH CREATIVE DESIRE.
I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT SOME ACTIVITIES HAVE MORE ART IN THEM THAN OTHERS.
LIFE IS A SERIES OF MINUTE DECISIONS, SOME MOTIVATED BY SURVIVAL, SOME NOT, AND PROPORTIONS DO VARY.
BUT TO PROCLAIM, AS SO MANY SO OFTEN DO, THAT--
THAT'S NOT ART!
--PRESUMES THAT ART IS AN EITHER/OR PROPOSITION. I DON'T THINK IT IS.
RARE IS THE PERSON IN ANY OCCUPATION WHO EXPRESSES NOTHING...
...AND RARE IS THE ARTIST WHO CARES NOTHING FOR SUCCESS, I.E., SURVIVAL!


BUT THE IDEAL OF THE LATTER IS ALIVE IN THE HEARTS OF MANY ARTISTS WHO MAY HOPE FOR SUCCESS, BUT WON'T ALTER THEIR WORK TO OBTAIN IT.
$$
$
POWER
FAME
SEX
$$$$$$


THE "FINE ARTIST"--THE PURE ARTIST-- SAYS TO THE WORLD: "I DIDN'T DO THIS FOR MONEY! I DIDN'T DO THIS TO MATCH THE COLOR OF YOUR COUCHES!
"I DIDN'T DO THIS TO GET LAID! I DIDN'T DO THIS FOR FAME OR POWER OR GREED OR ANYTHING ELSE! I DID THIS FOR ART!"


IN OTHER WORDS: "MY ART HAS NO PRACTICAL VALUE WHATSOEVER!"
"BUT IT'S IMPORTANT!"


AND SOMETIMES IT IS, THOUGH IT MIGHT TAKE A CENTURY OR TWO FOR THE REST OF THE WORLD TO FIND OUT!


"PURE" ART IS ESSENTIALLY TIED TO THE QUESTION OF PURPOSE-- OF DECIDING WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF ART.


THIS IS AS TRUE IN COMICS AS IT IS IN PAINTING, WRITING, THEATRE, FILM, SCULPTURE, OR ANY OTHER FORM...
...BECAUSE THE CREATION OF ANY WORK IN ANY MEDIUM WILL ALWAYS FOLLOW A CERTAIN PATH.

1 IDEA/ PURPOSE

2 FORM

3 IDIOM

4 STRUCTURE

5 CRAFT

6 SURFACE

A PATH CONSISTING OF ***SIX STEPS.***

1 IDEA/ PURPOSE

FIRST: THE *IMPULSES*, THE *IDEAS*, THE *EMOTIONS*, THE *PHILOSOPHIES*, THE *PURPOSES* OF THE WORK... THE WORK'S ***"CONTENT."***

2 FORM

SECOND: THE ***FORM*** IT WILL TAKE... WILL IT BE A *BOOK*? A *CHALK DRAWING*? A *CHAIR*? A *SONG*? A *SCULPTURE*? A *POT HOLDER*? A *COMIC BOOK*?

3 IDIOM

THIRD: THE *"SCHOOL"* OF ART, THE VOCABULARY OF *STYLES* OR *GESTURES* OR *SUBJECT MATTER*, THE ***GENRE*** THAT THE WORK BELONGS TO... MAYBE A GENRE OF ITS OWN.

4 STRUCTURE

FOURTH: *PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER*... WHAT TO *INCLUDE*, WHAT TO *LEAVE OUT*... HOW TO *ARRANGE*, HOW TO ***COMPOSE*** THE WORK.

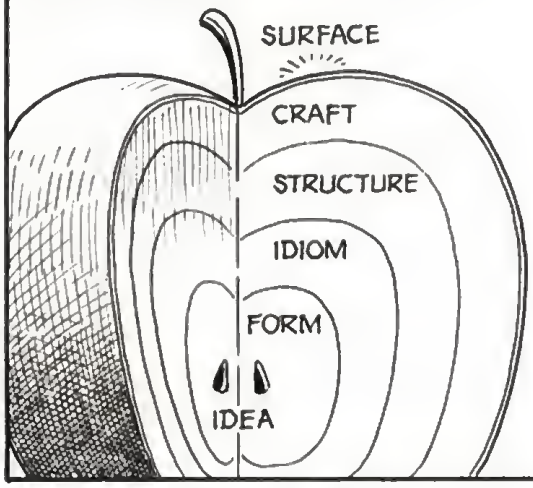
5
CRAFT

FIFTH: CONSTRUCTING THE WORK, APPLYING SKILLS, PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE, INVENTION, PROBLEM-SOLVING, GETTING THE "JOB" DONE.

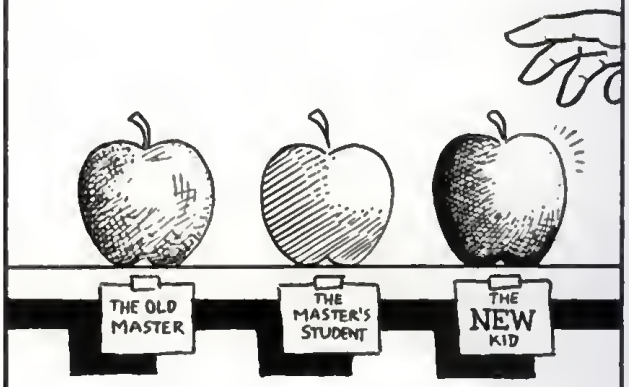
6
SURFACE

SIXTH: PRODUCTION VALUES, FINISHING... THE ASPECTS MOST APPARENT ON FIRST SUPERFICIAL EXPOSURE TO THE WORK.

IN ALL THE ARTS IT'S THE SURFACE THAT PEOPLE APPRECIATE MOST EASILY, LIKE AN APPLE CHOSEN FOR ITS SHINY SKIN.



THE LATEST "FAN FAVORITE" OFTEN LOOKS BETTER AT A GLANCE THAN THE OLDER ARTISTS WHO HAD THE IDEAS AND CREATED THE IDIOMS, BUT WERE LESS INTERESTED IN SURFACES.



BUT OFTEN IF WE BITE INTO THAT SHINY NEW APPLE--

CRUNCH!

HOLLOW.

IT'S A CYCLE AS OLD AS ART ITSELF.

IN **COMICS**, THE CYCLE BEGINS *ALL OVER THE WORLD*, AS YOUNG READERS *DISCOVER* COMICS FOR THE FIRST TIME AND IN A FEW CASES, BEGIN TO DEVELOP A *LOVE* FOR COMICS THAT WILL LAST A *LIFETIME!*

UNE AVENTURE D'Asterix LE GAULOIS

le bouclier ARVERNE

Texte

Dessins de UDERZO

BATMAN

IN THIS EARLY STAGE, THESE READERS ARE EXPERIENCING THE *CHARACTERS, IDEAS, EVENTS AND EMOTIONS* OF THE STORY *DIRECTLY*

COMICS IS ACTING AS AN *INTERMEDIARY* BETWEEN *STORYTELLER* AND *AUDIENCE.*

BIG IDEA COMIX

BUT IN SOME, AN AWARENESS OF THE ***FORM*** BEGINS TO DEVELOP, AN AWARENESS THAT ALL COMICS ARE JUST *INK ON PAPER--*

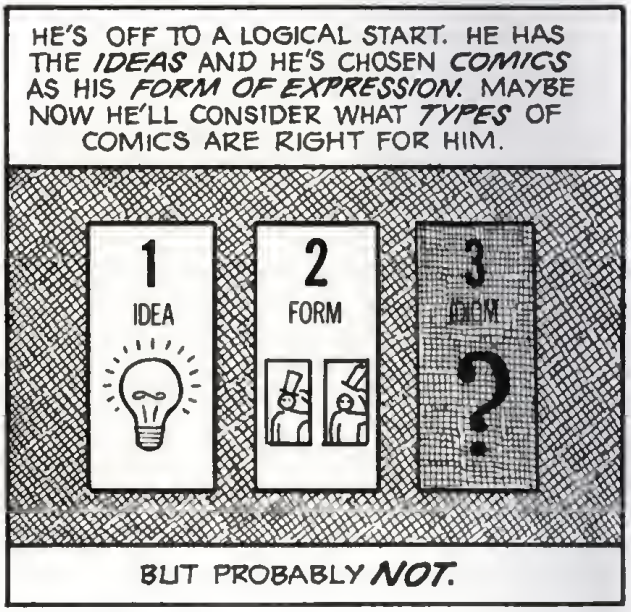
--THAT *MAKING* THEM ONLY REQUIRES CERTAIN *SKILLS--*

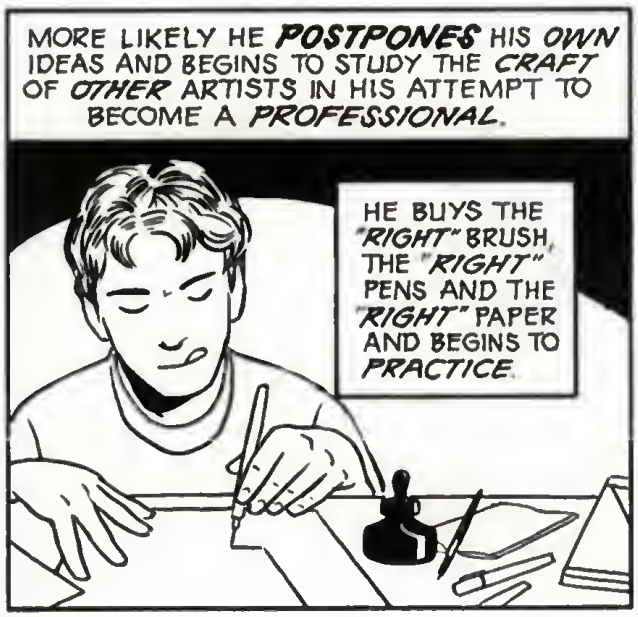
1 IDEA/ PURPOSE

2 FORM

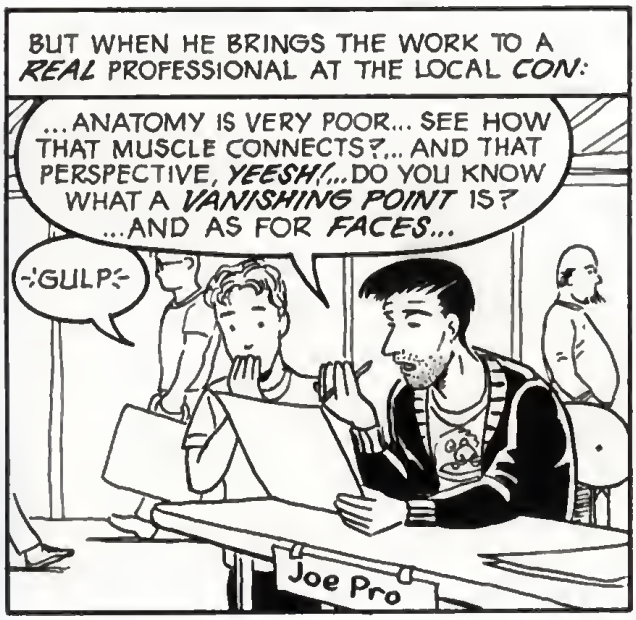
--AND THAT THOSE SKILLS CAN BE *LEARNED!*


ONE OF THEM--FULL OF BIG IDEAS--
MAKES THE BIG DECISION.
I'M GONNA MAKE COMICS WHEN I GROW UP!
AMEN


HE'S OFF TO A LOGICAL START. HE HAS THE IDEAS AND HE'S CHOSEN COMICS AS HIS FORM OF EXPRESSION. MAYBE NOW HE'LL CONSIDER WHAT TYPES OF COMICS ARE RIGHT FOR HIM.
1
IDEA
2
FORM
3
?
BUT PROBABLY NOT.


MORE LIKELY HE POSTPONES HIS OWN IDEAS AND BEGINS TO STUDY THE CRAFT OF OTHER ARTISTS IN HIS ATTEMPT TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL.
HE BUYS THE "RIGHT" BRUSH, THE "RIGHT" PENS AND THE "RIGHT" PAPER AND BEGINS TO PRACTICE.


EVENTUALLY..
6
SURFACE
LOOK, JACK! I CAN DRAW AS WELL AS A PROFESSIONAL!
WOW!

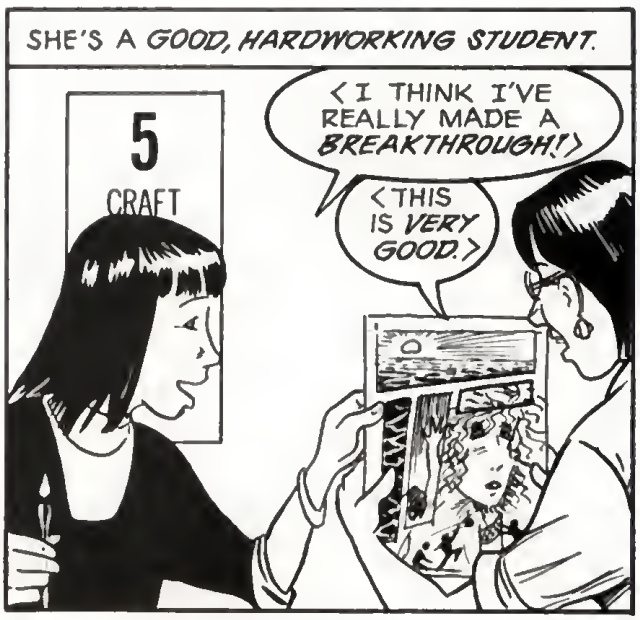

BUT WHEN HE BRINGS THE WORK TO A REAL PROFESSIONAL AT THE LOCAL CON:
...ANATOMY IS VERY POOR... SEE HOW THAT MUSCLE CONNECTS?... AND THAT PERSPECTIVE, YEESH!...DO YOU KNOW WHAT A VANISHING POINT IS? ...AND AS FOR FACES...
-:GULP:-
Joe Pro


SO HE BUYS SOME BOOKS ON ANATOMY AND PERSPECTIVE, STUDIES A VARIETY OF DRAWING TECHNIQUES AND PRACTICES. PRACTICES, PRACTICES FOR MONTHS.
MAY
JUNE
JULY
SEPTEMBER


BUT SOMEHOW, IT NEVER QUITE "CLICKS" FOR HIM. MAYBE HE JUST DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH SKILL... MAYBE HE LOSES INTEREST... MAYBE LIFE JUST GETS IN THE WAY... BUT FOR WHATEVER REASON--
-- HE LEAVES HIS DREAMS OF MAKING COMICS BEHIND.


BUT ALL OVER THE WORLD, OTHERS HAVE UNDERGONE SIMILAR EXPERIENCES AND HAVEN'T GIVEN UP YET!


ONE OF THEM IS NOW READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP! SHE'S STUDIED HER CRAFT ALL THE WAY THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND INTO COLLEGE.


SHE'S A GOOD, HARDWORKING STUDENT.
5
CRAFT
<I THINK I'VE REALLY MADE A BREAKTHROUGH!>
<THIS IS VERY GOOD.>


BUT WHEN SHE SHOWS HER WORK TO A SEASONED PRO...
<YOU'RE A SKILLED SCRIPTER AND DRAFTSPERSON, BUT YOUR STORYTELLING ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH, YOU HAVE NO SENSE OF PACING... THESE LAYOUTS ARE VERY MUDDY... YOU HAVE TO COMPOSE YOUR STORIES...>
<:GULP!:>


HER SKILLS CAN GET HER WORK AT THIS POINT, BUT ONLY AS AN ASSISTANT TO OTHERS. UNTIL SHE UNDERSTANDS THE STRUCTURE OF COMICS BENEATH THE CRAFT, THIS IS AS FAR AS SHE CAN GO.

BUT MAYBE THIS IS *ENOUGH* FOR THIS PARTICULAR ARTIST, ENOUGH TO JUST BE PART OF THE *ART, BUSINESS,* AND *COMMUNITY* OF COMICS WITHOUT NECESSARILY *CALLING THE SHOTS.*

BUT *ELSEWHERE,* ANOTHER CREATOR HAS BEEN THROUGH THE SAME SORT OF PROCESS AND HE WANTS *MORE!*

HE SPENDS HIS *EVERY WAKING HOUR* WORKING OUT THE *DIFFICULT PRINCIPLES* OF *COMICS COMPOSITION AND STORYTELLING,* THE KIND THEY *DON'T TEACH* IN *BOOKS!**

<PLEASE, TRY TO GET SOME *SLEEP,* HONEY.>

HE DISCOVERS THAT HIS *FAVORITE ARTIST* WAS ACTUALLY JUST A *WATERED-DOWN VERSION* OF AN *OLDER, LESS-POLISHED* ARTIST WHOM HE HAD ALWAYS *TAKEN FOR GRANTED.*

<THIS GUY WAS *GOD!*>

HE LEARNS TO SEE *BENEATH* THE CRAFTS OF *DRAFTSMANSHIP* AND *SCRIPTING* TO SEE THE *WHOLE* PICTURE-- PACING, DRAMA, HUMOR, SUSPENSE, COMPOSITION, THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT, IRONY-- SOON THEY'RE ALL AT HIS *COMMAND!*

4 STRUCTURE

<I'VE *DONE IT!* I'VE LEARNED *ALL THERE IS TO KNOW!*>

<THIS *TIME* I'LL GET MY *OWN BOOK,* I'M *SURE* OF IT!>

* WELL, OKAY, *ONE* BOOK! EISNER'S, AGAIN.

AND LET'S SAY IT *WORKS!* HE *DOES* LAND HIS OWN BOOK AND SOON IS ESTABLISHED AS A CREATOR OF *GREAT SKILL*. HE UNDERSTANDS *COMICS STORYTELLING* BETTER THAN MOST.

<THAT GUY'S ART IS ALL JUST *"SURFACE"!*>

AND HE *KNOWS* IT!

<*WOW!*>

HIS WORK ISN'T PARTICULARLY *ORIGINAL*, THE CRITICS DON'T PAY MUCH ATTENTION TO HIM, BUT HE MAKES A *DECENT LIVING* FOR *HIMSELF AND HIS FAMILY* AND THAT'S ENOUGH FOR HIM...

...ENOUGH THAT FOR WHAT HE DOES, HE'S *ONE OF THE BEST.*

BUT *ANOTHER ARTIST* HAS MADE IT THROUGH THE *SAME* SORTS OF HURDLES AND REACHED THE *SAME* LEVELS OF SUCCESS AND *STILL ISN'T SATISFIED*

SHE WONDERS IF HER SUCCESS REALLY *MEANS* ANYTHING WHEN THERE ARE *SO MANY OTHERS* DOING THE *SAME THINGS* IN THE *SAME WAYS*. SHE WANTS AN *IDENTITY.*

X-MEN

X-MEN

SHE BELIEVES THAT THERE'S SOMETHING *MORE*--SOME *PIECE OF THE PUZZLE*--THAT SHE *STILL HASN'T FOUND.*

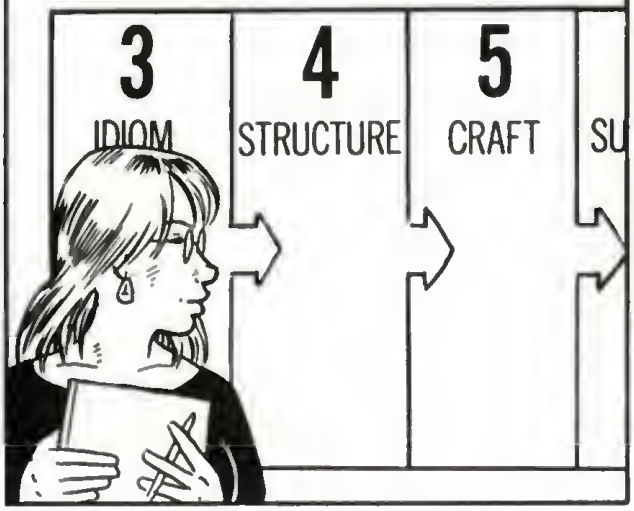
4

5
CRAFT

6
SURFACE

SHE BEGINS TO INVENT *NEW WAYS* OF SHOWING *"THE SAME OLD THING."* SHE DEVELOPS *INNOVATIVE NEW TECHNIQUES*, AND STARTS *DOING AWAY* WITH "THE SAME OLD THING" *ALTOGETHER!*

AS SHE CREATES *HER OWN PERSONAL* ***IDIOM*** OF COMICS, SHE FINDS THE WHOLE OF HER WORK CHANGING TO *SUIT* THAT IDIOM.



LET'S SAY THAT *FINANCIAL SUCCESS* AND THE *RESPECT OF HER PEERS* SOON FOLLOW.*



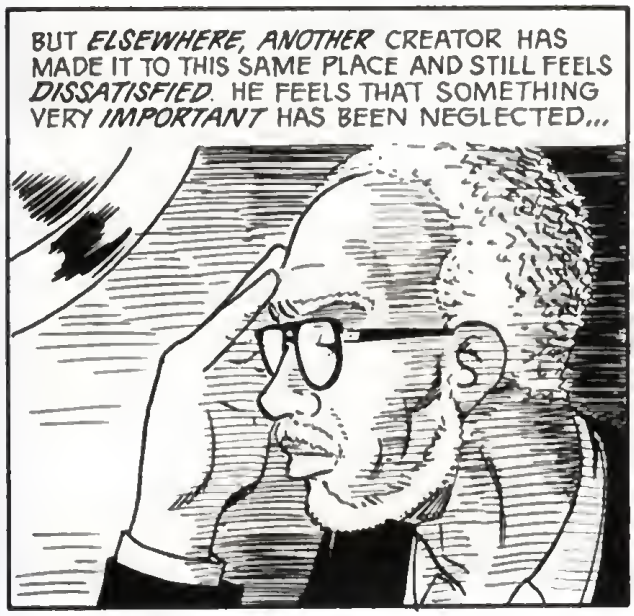
YOUNG ARTISTS BEGIN TO *IMITATE* HER STYLE, BUT MOST OF THEM ONLY SEEM TO APPRECIATE THE *"SURFACE."*



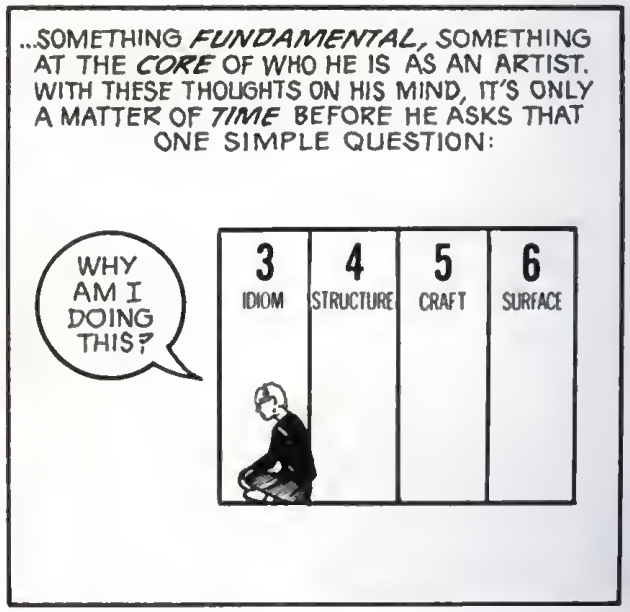
AND MAYBE SHE'LL BE *SATISFIED* WITH THAT KIND OF SUCCESS, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WHATEVER SHE ***DOESN'T*** KNOW, SHE'S ON THE RIGHT PATH TO *FIND OUT.*

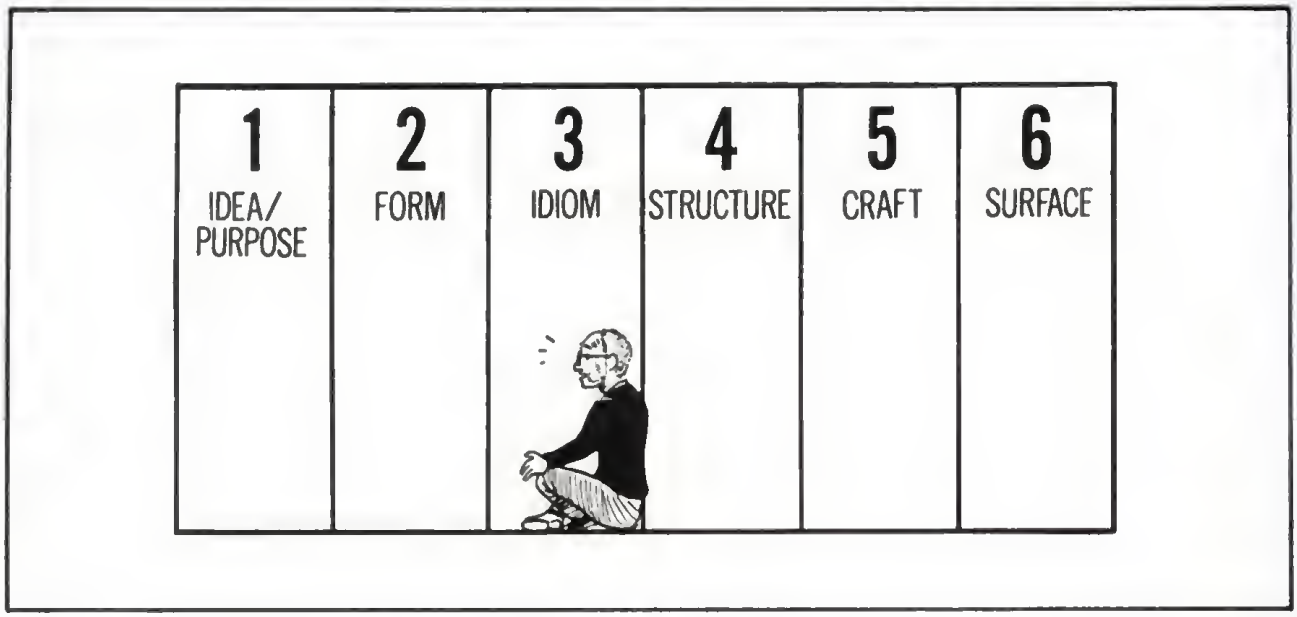


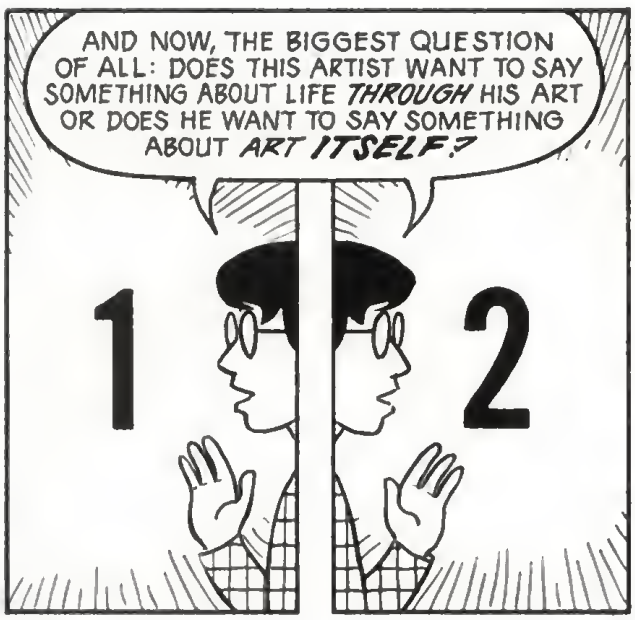
BUT *ELSEWHERE, ANOTHER* CREATOR HAS MADE IT TO THIS SAME PLACE AND STILL FEELS *DISSATISFIED.* HE FEELS THAT SOMETHING VERY *IMPORTANT* HAS BEEN NEGLECTED...



...SOMETHING *FUNDAMENTAL,* SOMETHING AT THE *CORE* OF WHO HE IS AS AN ARTIST. WITH THESE THOUGHTS ON HIS MIND, IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF *TIME* BEFORE HE ASKS THAT ONE SIMPLE QUESTION:

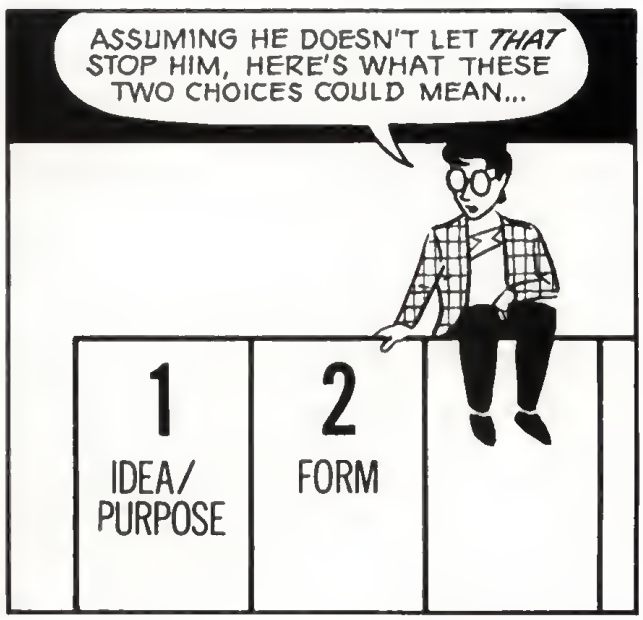



1
IDEA/
PURPOSE
2
FORM
3
IDIOM
4
STRUCTURE
5
CRAFT
6
SURFACE

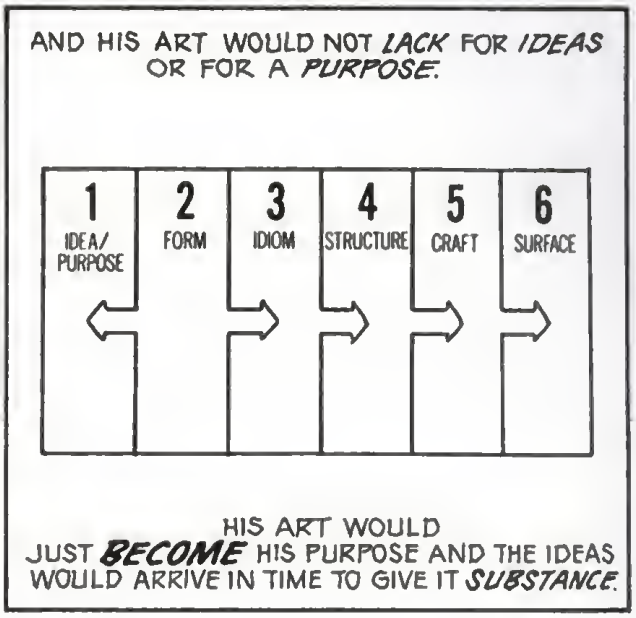

AND NOW, THE BIGGEST QUESTION OF ALL: DOES THIS ARTIST WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT LIFE *THROUGH* HIS ART OR DOES HE WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT *ART ITSELF?*
1
2

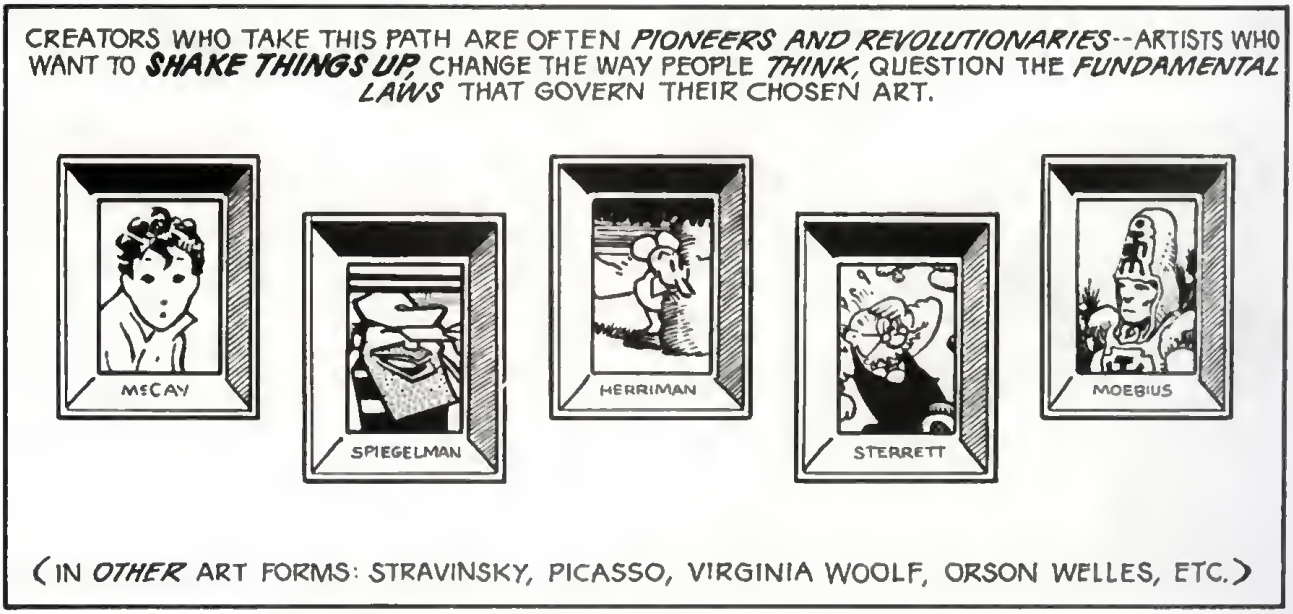

AND...
1
2
3
4
5
6
DO I HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY AT ALL?


PERSONALLY, I THINK WE *ALL* HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO THE WORLD.
THE *REAL* QUESTION IS "WILL ANYONE *LISTEN?*" AND *UNFORTUNATELY* THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW THAT IN *ADVANCE.*


ASSUMING HE DOESN'T LET *THAT* STOP HIM, HERE'S WHAT THESE TWO CHOICES COULD MEAN...
1
IDEA/
PURPOSE
2
FORM


2
FORM
BY CHOOSING *FORM*, HE'D BE SETTING UP TO BECOME AN *EXPLORER*.
HIS GOAL: TO *DISCOVER* ALL THAT THE ART FORM IS *CAPABLE* OF.


AND HIS ART WOULD NOT *LACK* FOR *IDEAS* OR FOR A *PURPOSE*.
1 IDEA/ PURPOSE
2 FORM
3 IDIOM
4 STRUCTURE
5 CRAFT
6 SURFACE
HIS ART WOULD JUST ***BECOME*** HIS PURPOSE AND THE IDEAS WOULD ARRIVE IN TIME TO GIVE IT *SUBSTANCE*.


CREATORS WHO TAKE THIS PATH ARE OFTEN *PIONEERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES*--ARTISTS WHO WANT TO ***SHAKE THINGS UP***, CHANGE THE WAY PEOPLE *THINK*, QUESTION THE *FUNDAMENTAL LAWS* THAT GOVERN THEIR CHOSEN ART.
McCAY
SPIEGELMAN
HERRIMAN
STERRETT
MOEBIUS
(IN *OTHER* ART FORMS: STRAVINSKY, PICASSO, VIRGINIA WOOLF, ORSON WELLES, ETC.)


1
IDEA/ PURPOSE
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE CHOOSES THE ***FIRST*** STEP AS HIS GOAL, THEN HIS ART BECOMES A ***TOOL***.
AND THE ***POWERS*** OF THAT ART WILL RELY ON THE POWERS OF THE IDEAS ***WITHIN***.


NOW *"TELLING THE STORY"* (OR IN THE CASE OF *NON-FICTION*, *"DELIVERING THE MESSAGE"*) TAKES *PRIORITY* OVER *INVENTION*.
1 IDEA/ PURPOSE
2 FORM
3 IDIOM
4 STRUCTURE
5 CRAFT
6 SURFACE
BUT TELLING A STORY AS ***EFFECTIVELY*** AS POSSIBLE MAY ***REQUIRE*** *SOME* INVENTION. IT OFTEN *DOES*.

THIS IS THE PATH OF GREAT ***STORYTELLERS***, CREATORS WHO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY *THROUGH* COMICS AND DEVOTE ALL THEIR ENERGIES TO *CONTROLLING* THEIR MEDIUM, REFINING ITS ABILITY TO CONVEY MESSAGES *EFFECTIVELY*.







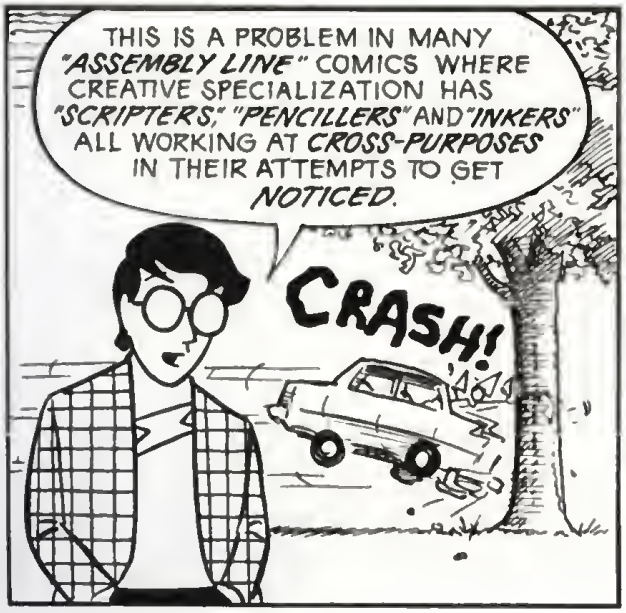




(IN OTHER ART FORMS: CAPRA, DICKENS, WOODY GUTHRIE, EDWARD R. MURROW, ETC.)









THE MORE AN ARTIST DEVOTES HIM/HERSELF TO EITHER OF THESE TWO FOCAL POINTS, THE MORE DRAMATIC THE CHANGE IF HE/SHE DECIDES TO *SWITCH!*

ART SPIEGELMAN'S AGGRESSIVELY EXPERIMENTAL WORK OF THE *SEVENTIES* AND EARLY *EIGHTIES* LEFT NO ONE PREPARED FOR THE UNASSUMING *"REPORT"* STYLE OF HIS LANDMARK BIOGRAPHY *"MAUS."*

2 FORM

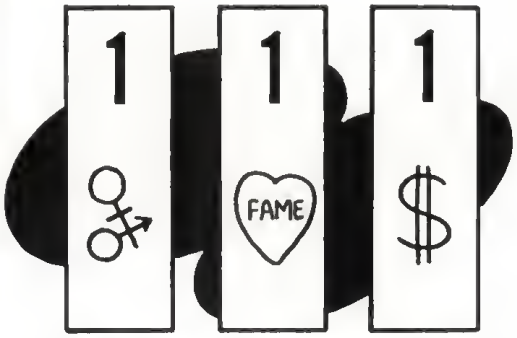


1 IDEA/ PURPOSE



ART AND SCRIPT © ART SPIEGELMAN

PERHAPS IF STRIPPED DOWN FAR ENOUGH, MOST ARTISTS' ULTIMATE GOALS ARE NOT THAT DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE'S. EVEN FOR THOSE WITH *HIGH IDEALS,* BASIC INSTINCTS EXERT A POWERFUL ATTRACTION.



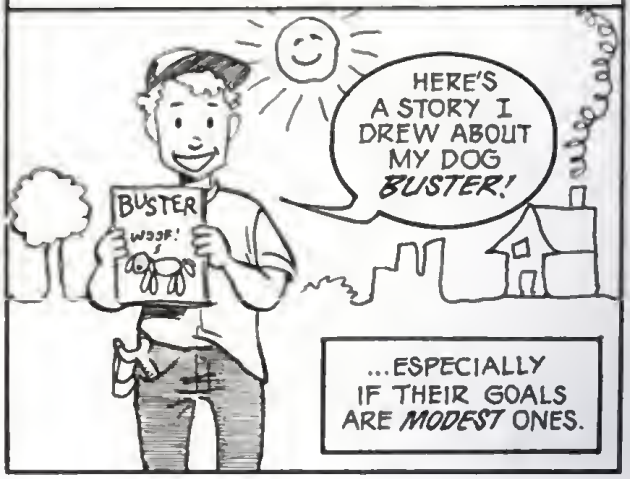
SURVIVAL ⟷ REPRODUCTION

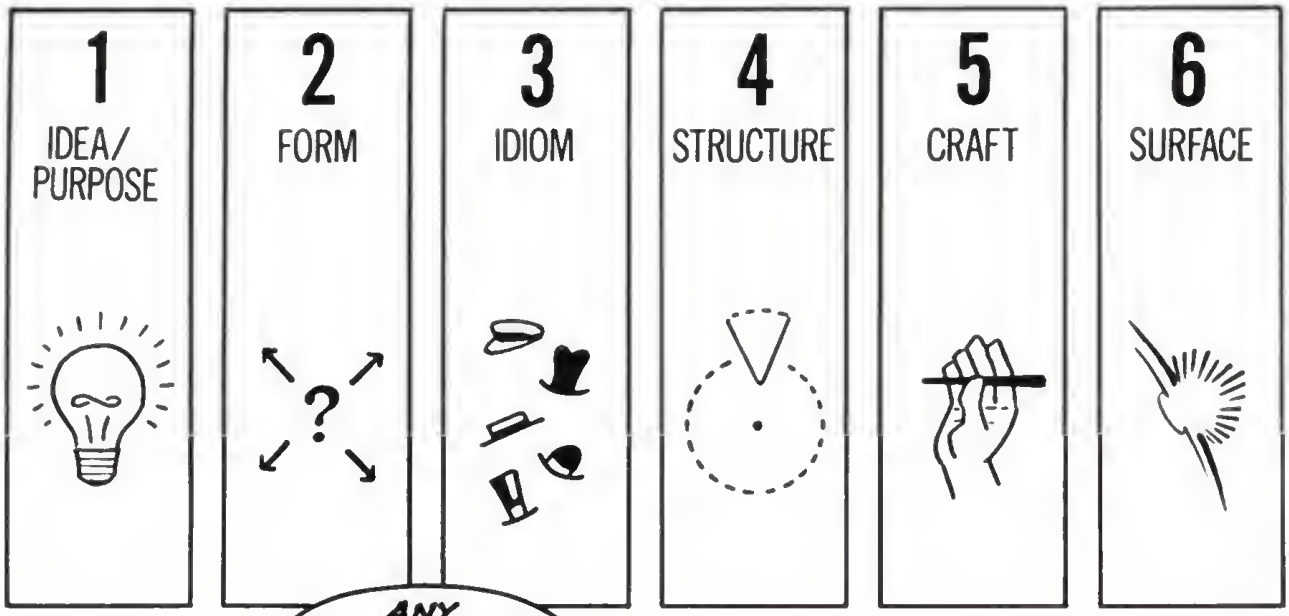
AND WHEN ART BECOMES A *JOB* OR A MATTER OF *SOCIAL STATUS* THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFUSING ONE'S GOALS GOES UP CONSIDERABLY.

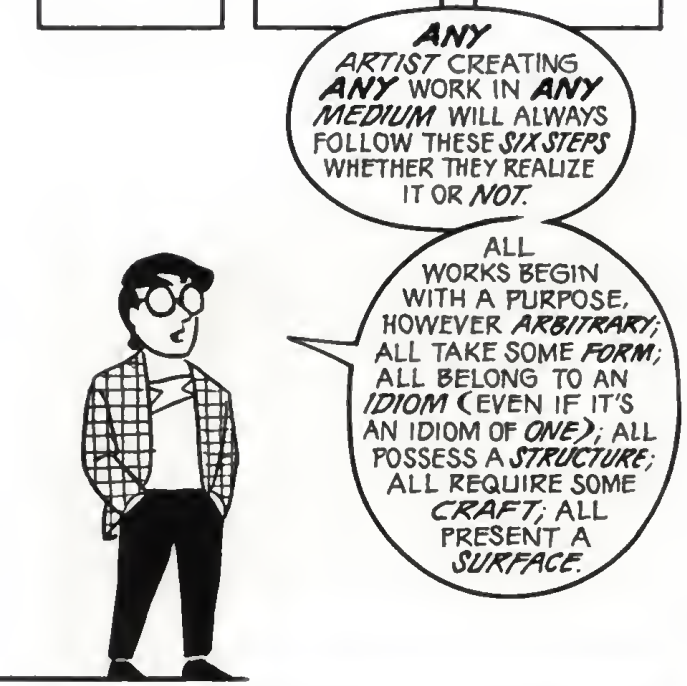
BUT EVEN IF WE TAKE LIFE'S *DISTRACTIONS* INTO ACCOUNT, IT'S STILL AMAZING HOW MUCH *TIME* AND *EFFORT* IS SPENT BY COMICS CREATORS TRYING TO GET WHAT THEY WANT OUT OF COMICS--

--BEFORE THEY EVEN KNOW *WHAT* THEY WANT!

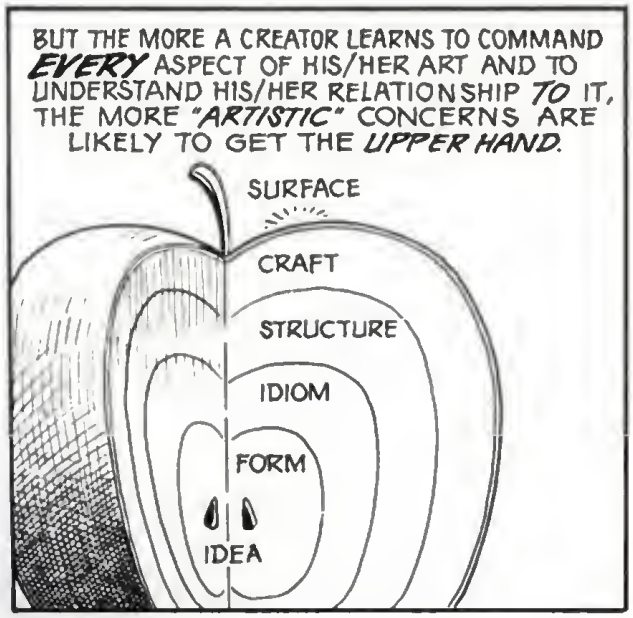
OF COURSE, NOT *EVERYBODY* TAKES THE *LONG* WAY AROUND. SOME ARTISTS HAVE NO TROUBLE SETTING GOALS AND *ACHIEVING* THEM WITHOUT ANY *DETOURS*...




1
IDEA/ PURPOSE
2
FORM
3
IDIOM
4
STRUCTURE
5
CRAFT
6
SURFACE

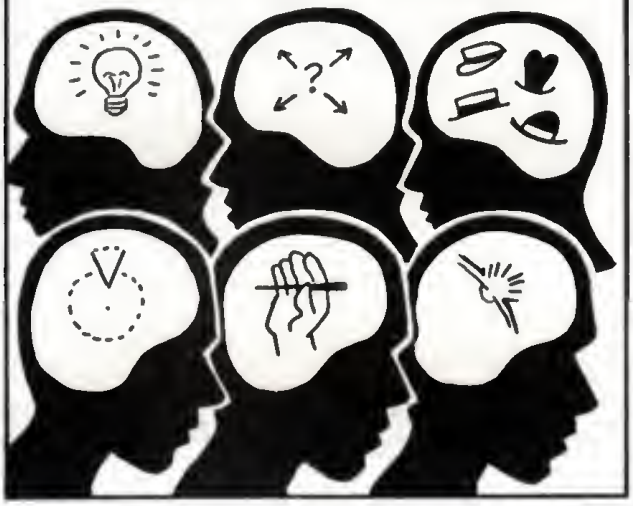

ANY ARTIST CREATING ANY WORK IN ANY MEDIUM WILL ALWAYS FOLLOW THESE SIX STEPS WHETHER THEY REALIZE IT OR NOT.
ALL WORKS BEGIN WITH A PURPOSE, HOWEVER ARBITRARY; ALL TAKE SOME FORM; ALL BELONG TO AN IDIOM (EVEN IF IT'S AN IDIOM OF ONE); ALL POSSESS A STRUCTURE; ALL REQUIRE SOME CRAFT; ALL PRESENT A SURFACE.


AND ALL ASPECTS OF COMICS HAVE THE POTENTIAL FOR SELF-EXPRESSION, EVEN WHEN ECONOMIC SURVIVAL IS THE ARTIST'S MAIN CONCERN.
THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM FOR A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF "ART."

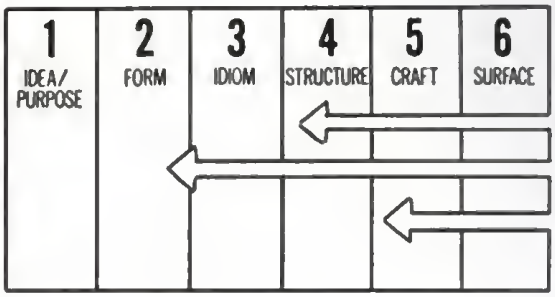

BUT THE MORE A CREATOR LEARNS TO COMMAND EVERY ASPECT OF HIS/HER ART AND TO UNDERSTAND HIS/HER RELATIONSHIP TO IT, THE MORE "ARTISTIC" CONCERNS ARE LIKELY TO GET THE UPPER HAND.
SURFACE
CRAFT
STRUCTURE
IDIOM
FORM
IDEA


THE ORDER OF THE SIX STEPS IS INNATE. LIKE THE ARRANGEMENT OF BONES IN A DINOSAUR'S SKELETON, THEY CAN BE DISCOVERED IN ANY ORDER, BUT WHEN BROUGHT TOGETHER, THEY WILL ALWAYS FALL INTO PLACE!

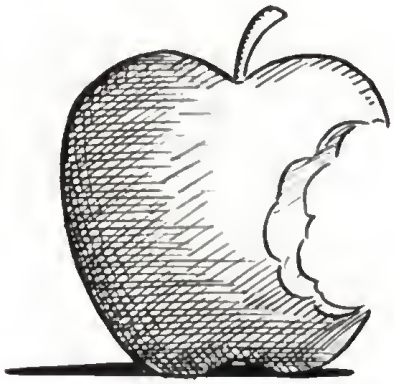
IN *PRACTICE*, ***ANY*** ASPECT OF COMICS MAY BE THE ONE WHICH FIRST DRAWS AN ARTIST INTO ITS ORBIT.



STILL, THE LEARNING PROCESS FOR MOST ARTISTS IS A *SLOW AND STEADY JOURNEY* FROM ***END*** TO ***BEGINNING,***



FROM *SURFACE* TO *CORE.*



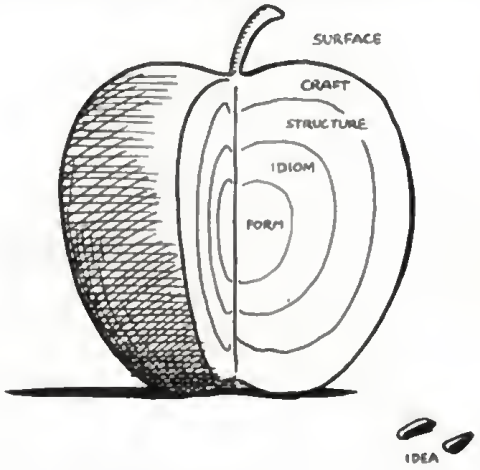
AND IT'S AT THE ***CORE*** OF ART THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IS FINALLY ASKED:

1
IDEA/ PURPOSE

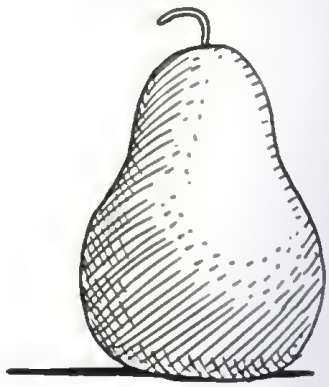
2
FORM

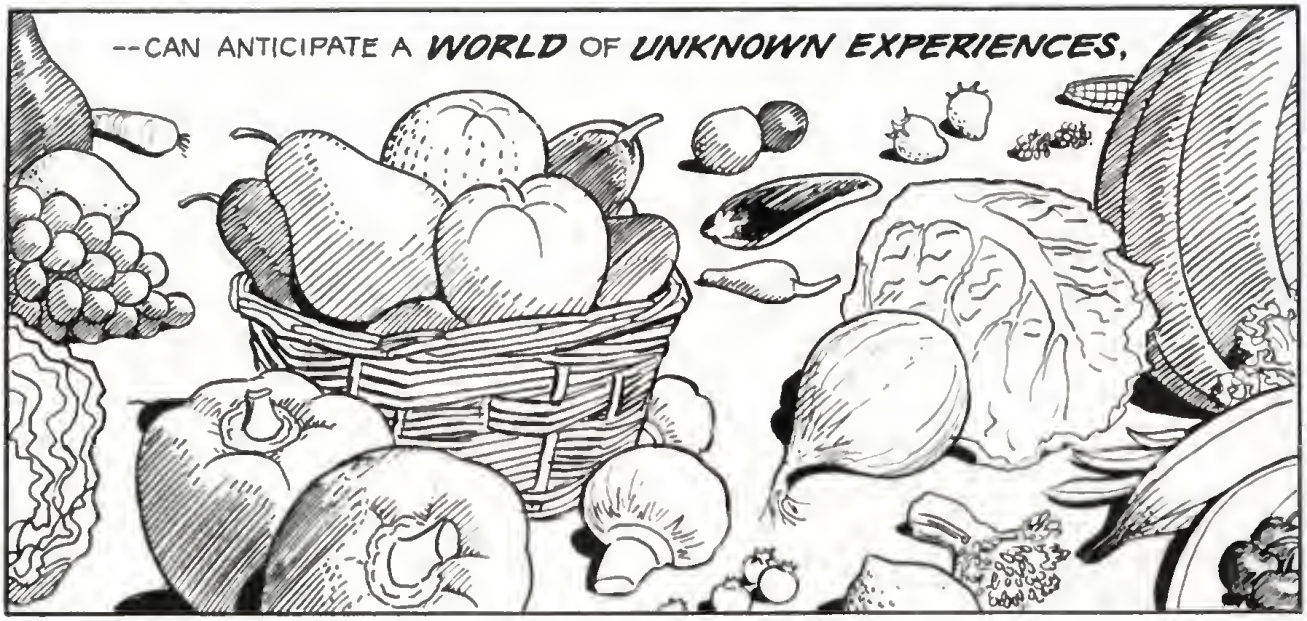
"WHY AM I DOING THIS?"

WHEN ***FORM*** RULES THE WORK, IT MAY SEEM SOMEWHAT ***ARTIFICIAL*** AT THE CORE, LIKE A *SEEDLESS FRUIT.*

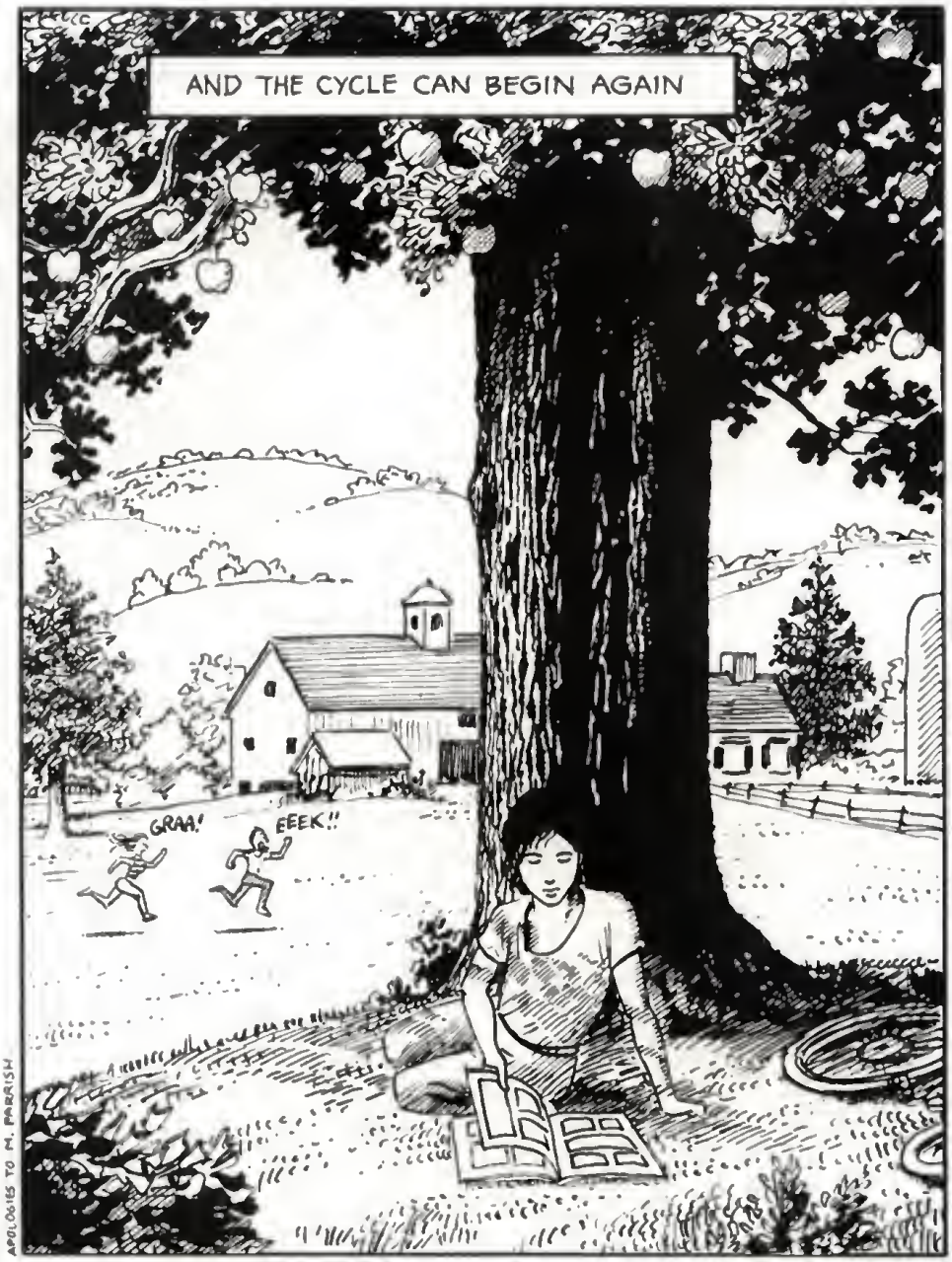


BUT SUCH WORKS DON'T TAKE THE ***SHAPE*** OF ART FOR GRANTED AND BY QUESTIONING OUR *FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS--*




--CAN ANTICIPATE A WORLD OF UNKNOWN EXPERIENCES.


WHILE IF IDEAS RULE THE WORK AND DETERMINE ITS SHAPE, COMICS CAN HELP PLANT THOSE IDEAS FAR AND WIDE.


AND THE CYCLE CAN BEGIN AGAIN
GRAA!
EEEK!!
APOLOGIES TO M. PARRISH

CHAPTER EIGHT

A WORD ABOUT COLOR.















COMMERCE

AND

TECHNOLOGY.

ACRYLIC COLOR

ACRYLIC COLORS

ACRYLIC COLORS

NOW *ALL* ASPECTS OF COMICS HISTORY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY *COMMERCE*. MONEY HAS A TREMENDOUS EFFECT ON WHAT IS AND *ISN'T* SEEN.

BUT *COLOR* IN COMICS HAS ALWAYS BEEN UNUSUALLY *SENSITIVE* TO THE *SHIFTING TIDES OF TECHNOLOGY.*

THE TECHNOLOGY OF COLOR REPRODUCTION WAS FIRST ANTICIPATED IN *1861* WHEN SCOTTISH PHYSICIST *SIR JAMES CLERK-MAXWELL* ISOLATED WHAT WE NOW CALL *THE THREE ADDITIVE PRIMARIES.*

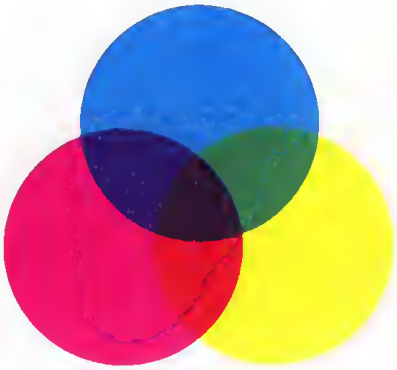
THESE COLORS -- ROUGHLY, *RED, BLUE* AND *GREEN* -- WHEN PROJECTED TOGETHER ON A SCREEN IN *VARIOUS COMBINATIONS*, COULD REPRODUCE EVERY COLOR IN THE *VISIBLE SPECTRUM.*

THEY WERE CALLED *ADDITIVE* BECAUSE THEY LITERALLY *ADDED UP* TO *PURE WHITE LIGHT.*

EIGHT YEARS LATER, FRENCH PIANIST *LOUIS DUCOS DU HAURON** DEVISED THE IDEA OF THREE *SUBTRACTIVE* PRIMARIES.

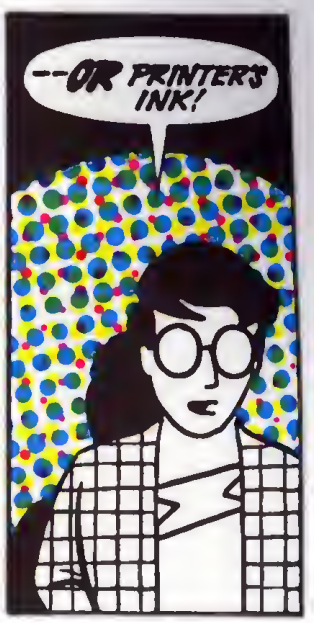
*WHOM I *DON'T* HAVE A PICTURE OF.

THESE COLORS -- CYAN, MAGENTA AND YELLOW* -- CAN ALSO MIX TO PRODUCE ANY HUE IN THE VISIBLE SPECTRUM, BUT RATHER THAN ADDING LIGHT, THESE THREE DO IT BY FILTERING IT OUT!

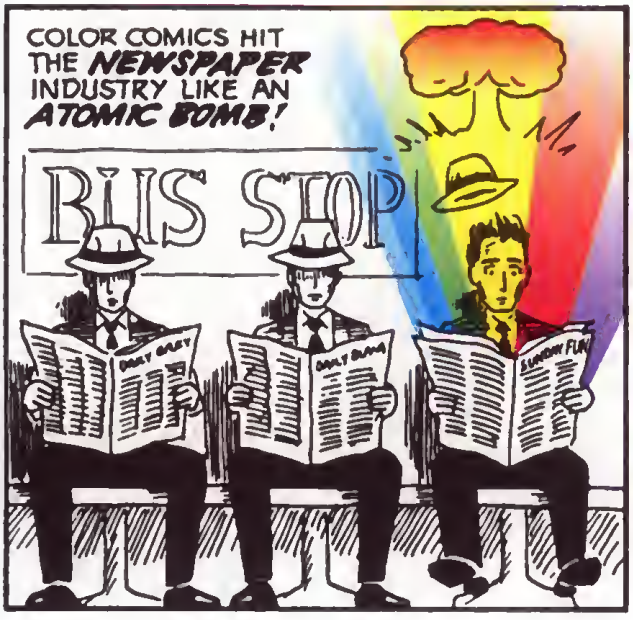


THIS SUBTRACTIVE EFFECT WAS ACHIEVED THROUGH TRANSPARENT SUBSTANCES SUCH AS CELLOPHANE, COLORED GLASS, WATER COLORS --

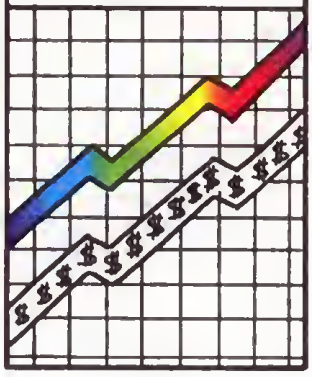




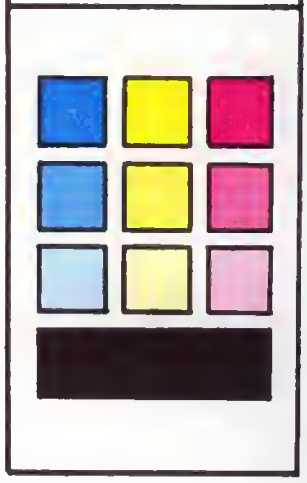
COLOR COMICS HIT THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY LIKE AN ATOMIC BOMB!



COLOR BOOSTED SALES, BUT IT ALSO BOOSTED COSTS! MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO STREAMLINE THE PROCESS AND MAKE IT MORE COST-EFFECTIVE.



AND THE STANDARD "FOUR COLOR" PROCESS TOOK OVER.



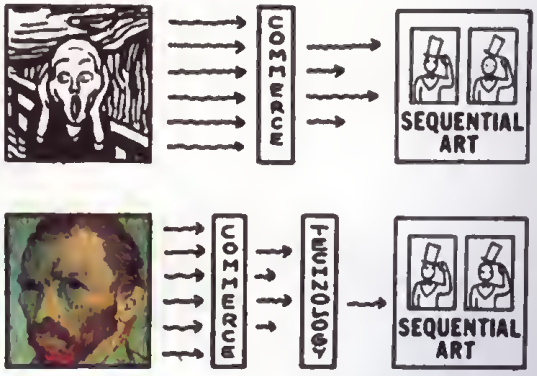
THIS PROCESS RESTRICTED THE INTENSITY OF THE THREE PRIMARIES TO 100%, 50% ND 20%, USING BLACK INK FOR THE LINE WORK.



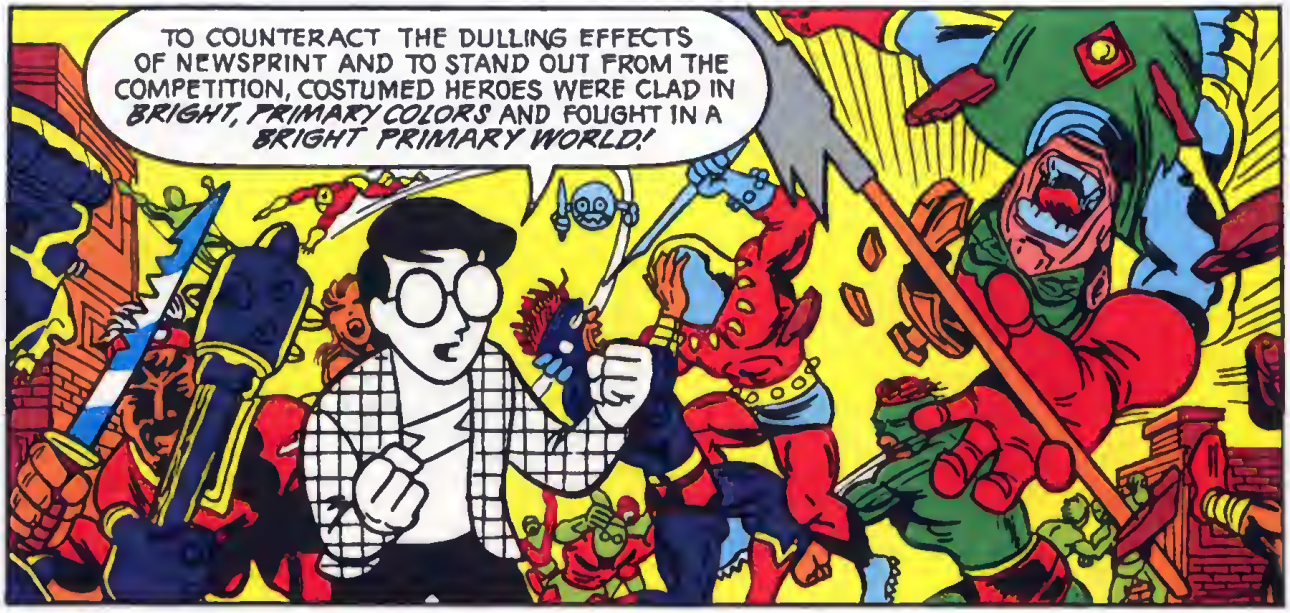
THE LOOK OF THESE COLORS, HELD BY BOLD, SIMPLE OUTLINES, AND REPRODUCED ON CHEAP NEWSPRINT EVENTUALLY BECAME THE LOOK OF COMICS IN AMERICA.



SO, WHILE THE EXPRESSIVE ART OF LINE WAS SUBJECTED TO THE SUBTRACTIVE FILTER OF COMMERCE ON ITS WAY TO COMICS, COLOR WAS SUBJECTED TO THE FILTERS OF BOTH COMMERCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

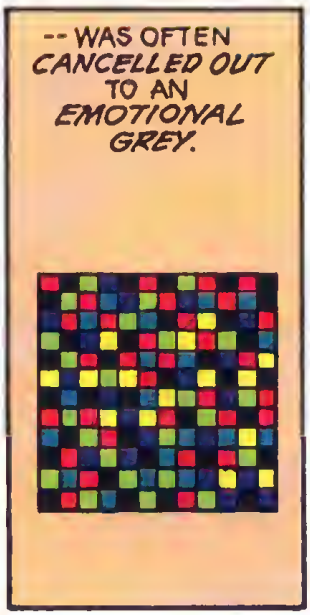


* FOR OPAQUE PIGMENTS: RED, YELLOW AND BLUE. I KNOW, IT'S TOTALLY WEIRD.

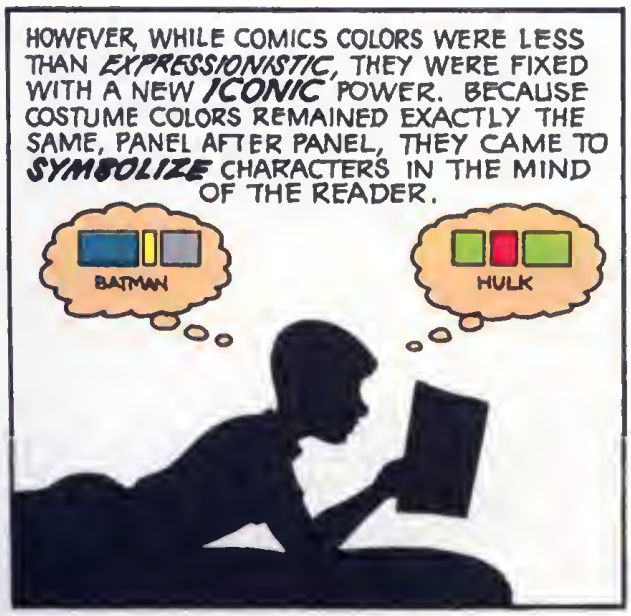

TO COUNTERACT THE DULLING EFFECTS OF NEWSPRINT AND TO STAND OUT FROM THE COMPETITION, COSTUMED HEROES WERE CLAD IN *BRIGHT, PRIMARY COLORS* AND FOUGHT IN A *BRIGHT PRIMARY WORLD!*


THE COLORS WERE PICKED FOR *STRENGTH* AND CONTRASTED STRONGLY WITH ONE ANOTHER, BUT ON MOST PAGES NO ONE COLOR *DOMINATED.*

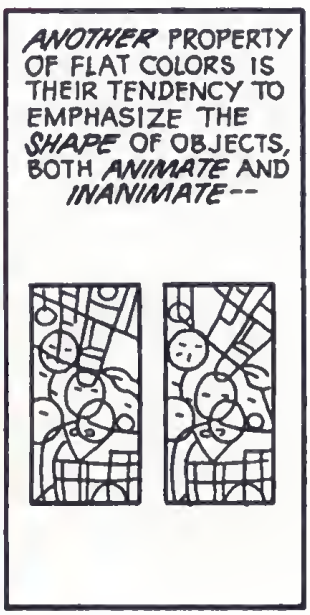

WITHOUT THE *EMOTIONAL IMPACT* OF *SINGLE-COLOR SATURATION,* THE *EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL* OF AMERICAN COLOR COMICS--


--WAS OFTEN *CANCELLED OUT* TO AN *EMOTIONAL GREY.*


AS ALWAYS, THERE WERE SOME *EXCEPTIONS,* BUT THIS WAS THE OVERALL TREND.


HOWEVER, WHILE COMICS COLORS WERE LESS THAN *EXPRESSIONISTIC,* THEY WERE FIXED WITH A NEW *ICONIC* POWER. BECAUSE COSTUME COLORS REMAINED EXACTLY THE SAME, PANEL AFTER PANEL, THEY CAME TO *SYMBOLIZE* CHARACTERS IN THE MIND OF THE READER.
BATMAN
HULK


MANY SEE THE SUPERHERO AS A FORM OF *MODERN MYTHOLOGY.* IF SO, THIS ASPECT OF COLOR MAY PLAY A PART.
SYMBOLS ARE THE STUFF OF WHICH *GODS* ARE MADE.


ANOTHER PROPERTY OF FLAT COLORS IS THEIR TENDENCY TO EMPHASIZE THE *SHAPE* OF OBJECTS, BOTH *ANIMATE* AND *INANIMATE*--

--AS ANY CHILD WHO HAS EVER *"COLORED-BY-NUMBERS"* KNOWS INSTINCTIVELY.





THESE COLORS *OBJECTIFY* THEIR SUBJECTS. WE BECOME MORE AWARE OF THE *PHYSICAL FORM* OF OBJECTS THAN IN *BLACK AND WHITE.*

A GAME IN MOTION BECOMES A BALL IN AIR. A FACE SHOWING EMOTION BECOMES A HEAD AND TWO HANDS.



THE WORLD TAKES ON THE CHILDHOOD REALITY OF THE *PLAYGROUND* AND RECALLS A TIME WHEN SHAPE *PRECEDED* MEANING. OBLONG SWING SETS. CYLINDRICAL JUNGLE GYMS. THE WONDER OF *THINGS!*



DOESN'T IT *FOLLOW* THEN THAT THE MASTERS OF *FLAT-COLOR* COMICS ARE, ABOVE ALL, MASTERS OF *FORM* AND *COMPOSITION?*



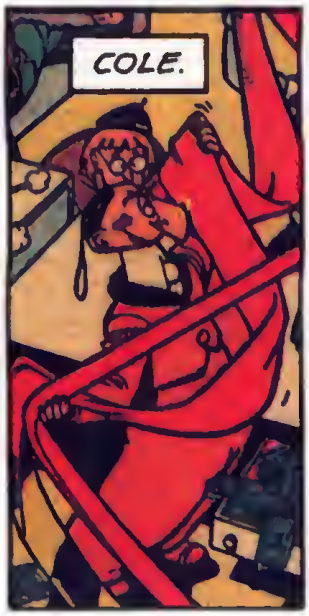
KIRBY.



McCAY.

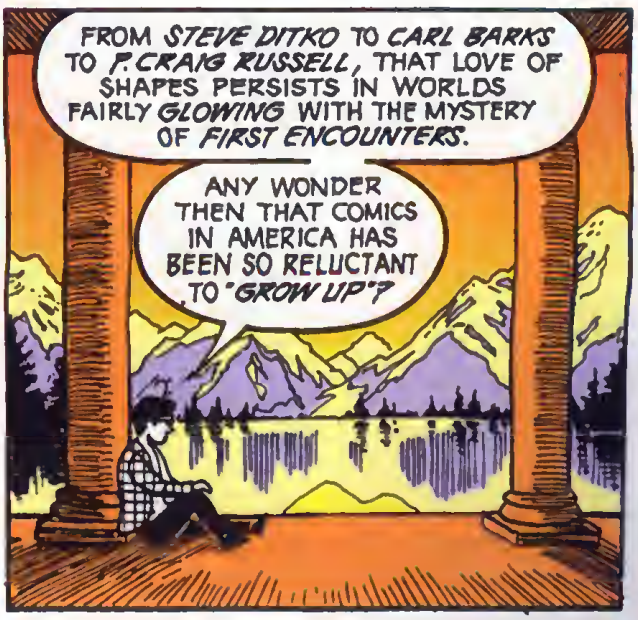


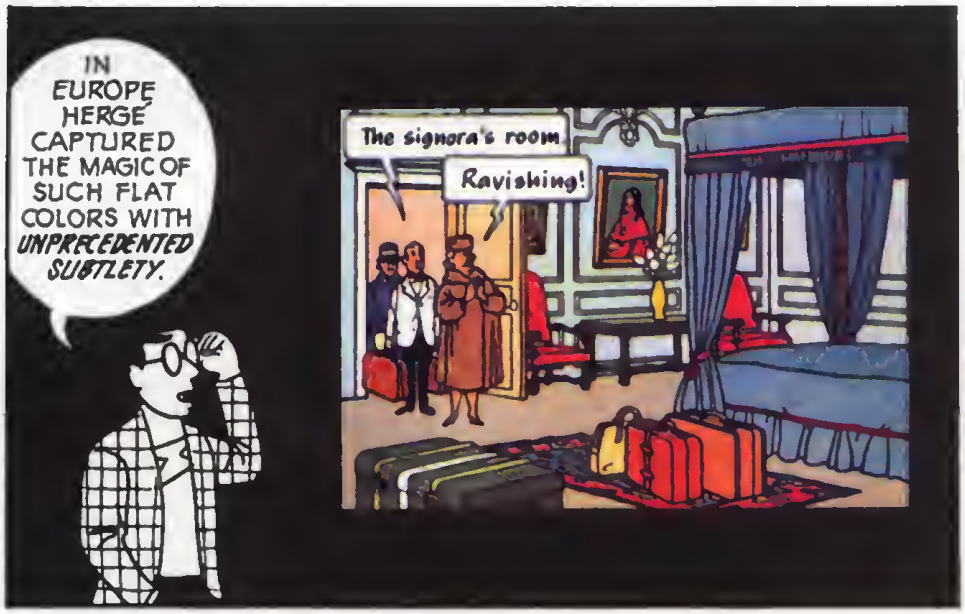
COLE.



FROM *STEVE DITKO* TO *CARL BARKS* TO *P. CRAIG RUSSELL*, THAT LOVE OF SHAPES PERSISTS IN WORLDS FAIRLY *GLOWING* WITH THE MYSTERY OF *FIRST ENCOUNTERS.*

ANY WONDER THEN THAT COMICS IN AMERICA HAS BEEN SO RELUCTANT TO *"GROW UP"?*




IN EUROPE HERGÉ CAPTURED THE MAGIC OF SUCH FLAT COLORS WITH *UNPRECEDENTED SUBTLETY.*
The signora's room
Ravishing!


HERGÉ CREATED A KIND OF *DEMOCRACY OF FORM* IN WHICH NO SHAPE WAS ANY LESS IMPORTANT THAN ANY *OTHER*-- A *COMPLETELY OBJECTIVE WORLD.*


COMICS *PRINTING* WAS *SUPERIOR* IN EUROPE AND FOR HERGÉ, FLAT COLORS WERE A *PREFERENCE*, NOT A NECESSITY.


BUT OTHERS SUCH AS *CLAVELOUX, CAZA* AND *MOEBIUS* SAW IN THEIR SUPERIOR PRINTING AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH A MORE INTENSE *SUBJECTIVE* PALETTE.


SOME OF THIS WORK BEGAN REACHING AMERICA IN THE *70's*, INSPIRING MANY YOUNG ARTISTS TO LOOK *BEYOND* THEIR FOUR-COLOR WALLS.
HEAVY METAL
VODKA


SUDDENLY IT SEEMED POSSIBLE FOR COLOR TO TAKE ON A *CENTRAL ROLE.*

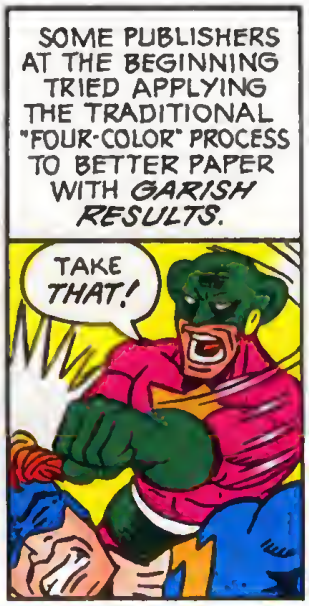

COLORS COULD EXPRESS A *DOMINANT MOOD.*


TONES AND MODELLING COULD ADD *DEPTH.*


WHOLE *SCENES* COULD BE VIRTUALLY *ABOUT COLOR!*


COLOR AS SENSATION, COLOR AS ENVIRONMENT.
COLOR AS COLOR!

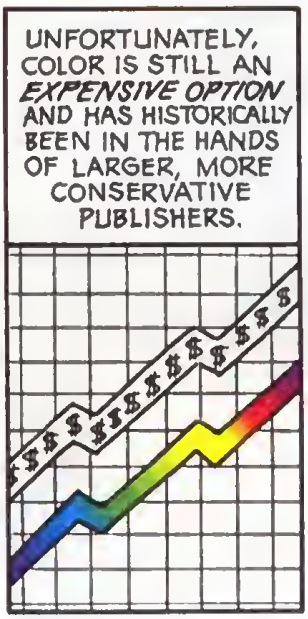

SINCE THE LATE 70's, MORE AND MORE "UPSCALE" COLOR PROJECTS HAVE BEGUN APPEARING IN AMERICA.


SOME PUBLISHERS AT THE BEGINNING TRIED APPLYING THE TRADITIONAL "FOUR-COLOR" PROCESS TO BETTER PAPER WITH GARISH RESULTS.
TAKE THAT!


WHEN MODELLING AND MORE SUBTLE HUES WERE APPLIED, THOUGH, THEY SEEMED OUT OF PLACE ON THE OLD SHAPE-SENSITIVE LINE DRAWINGS.
TAKE THAT!

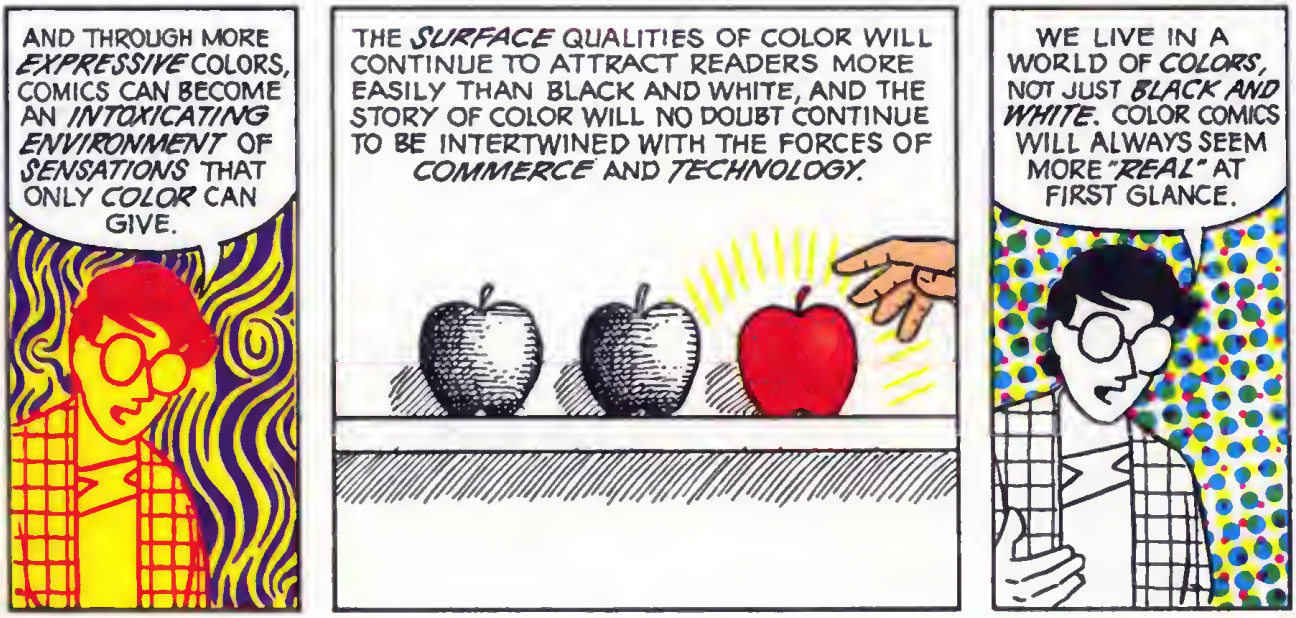

THE SURFACE WAS CHANGING, BUT NOT THE CORE. FOR ALL THEIR SUBTLE HUES, COMICS WERE STILL BEING WRITTEN IN PRIMARY COLORS!


THE NEW FORM REQUIRED THE CREATION OF NEW IDIOMS!


UNFORTUNATELY, COLOR IS STILL AN EXPENSIVE OPTION AND HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN IN THE HANDS OF LARGER, MORE CONSERVATIVE PUBLISHERS.


THIS IS BEGINNING TO CHANGE AS I WRITE THIS, BUT IT'S STILL THE EXCEPTION, NOT THE RULE. COMIC ARTISTS WANTING TO CONDUCT BOLD NEW EXPERIMENTS IN COMICS ART--
--STILL HAVE TO LEARN IN MOST CASES TO BE BOLD IN BLACK AND WHITE!

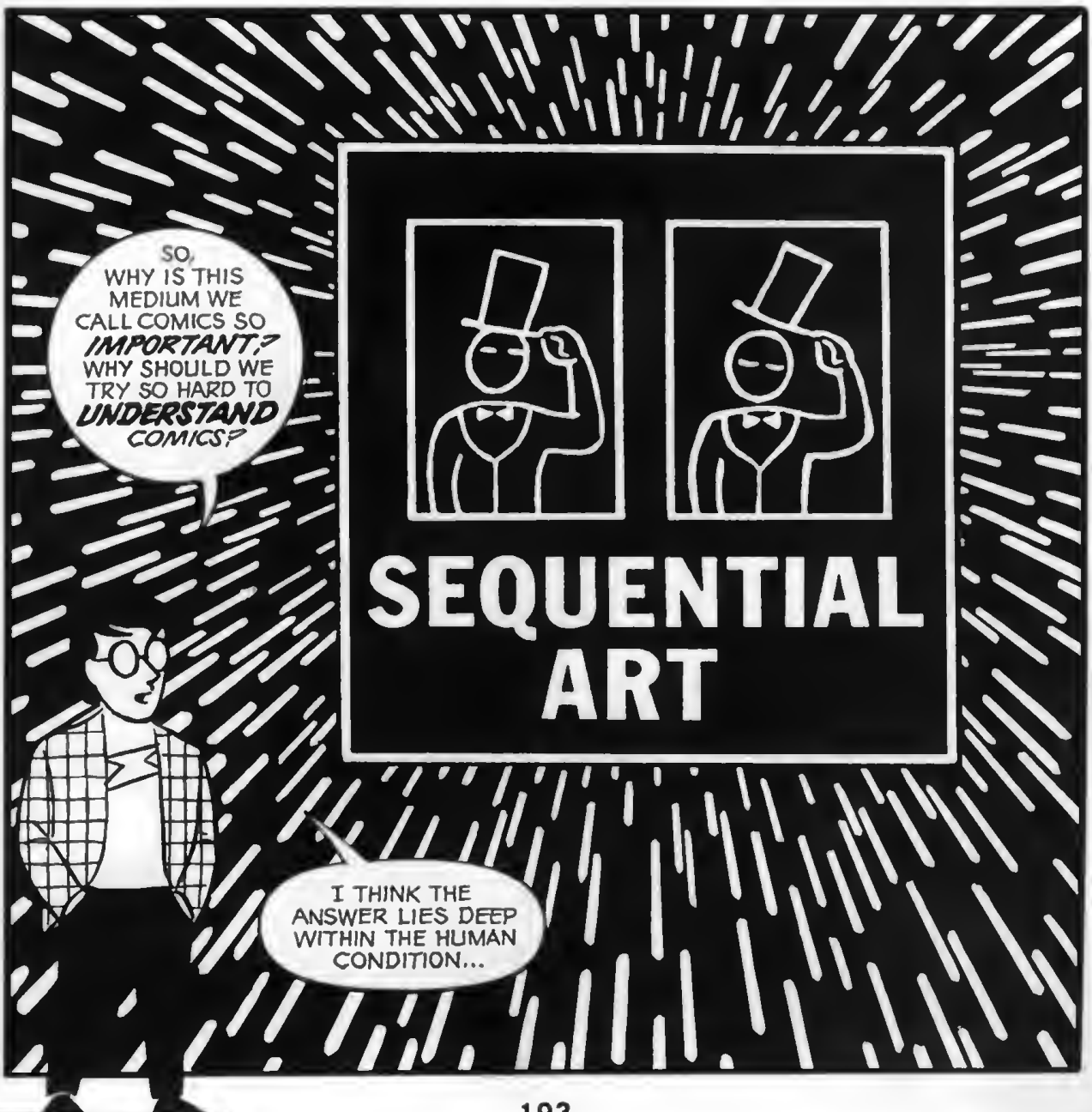

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BLACK-AND-WHITE AND COLOR COMICS ARE VAST AND PROFOUND, AFFECTING EVERY LEVEL OF THE READING EXPERIENCE.
IN BLACK AND WHITE, THE IDEAS BEHIND THE ART ARE COMMUNICATED MORE DIRECTLY. MEANING TRANSCENDS FORM. ART APPROACHES LANGUAGE.
IN FLAT COLORS FORMS THEMSELVES TAKE ON MORE SIGNIFICANCE. THE WORLD BECOMES A PLAYGROUND OF SHAPES AND SPACE.

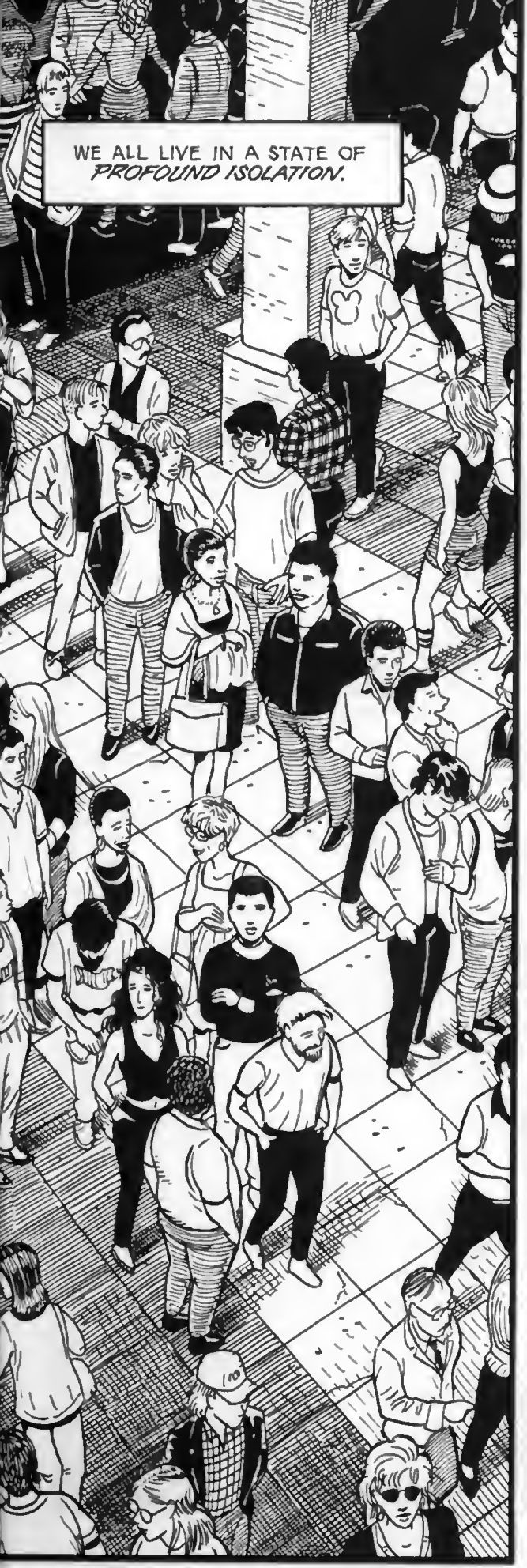

AND THROUGH MORE EXPRESSIVE COLORS, COMICS CAN BECOME AN INTOXICATING ENVIRONMENT OF SENSATIONS THAT ONLY COLOR CAN GIVE.
THE SURFACE QUALITIES OF COLOR WILL CONTINUE TO ATTRACT READERS MORE EASILY THAN BLACK AND WHITE, AND THE STORY OF COLOR WILL NO DOUBT CONTINUE TO BE INTERTWINED WITH THE FORCES OF COMMERCE AND TECHNOLOGY.
WE LIVE IN A WORLD OF COLORS, NOT JUST BLACK AND WHITE. COLOR COMICS WILL ALWAYS SEEM MORE "REAL" AT FIRST GLANCE.


BUT COMICS READERS LOOK FOR MANY THINGS BESIDES "REALITY" AND, TECHNOLOGY NOTWITHSTANDING, COLOR WILL NEVER REPLACE BLACK AND WHITE ENTIRELY.
ONE THING'S FOR SURE, THOUGH. WHEN USED WELL, COLOR IN COMICS CAN--LIKE COMICS ITSELF--
--AMOUNT TO FAR MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS.

CHAPTER NINE

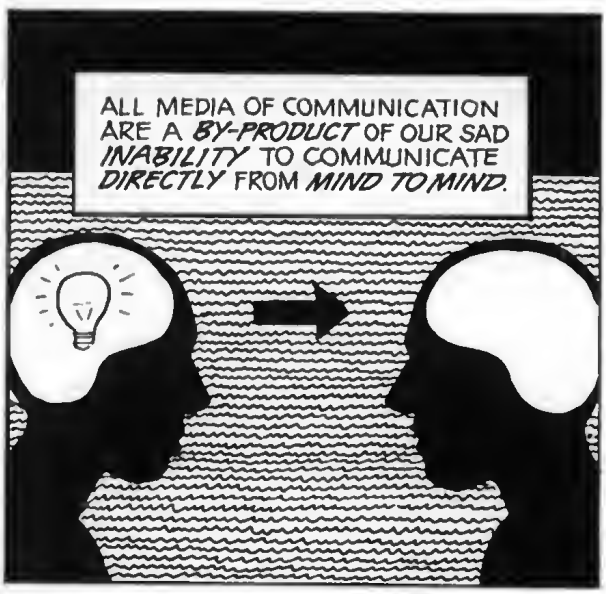
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER.

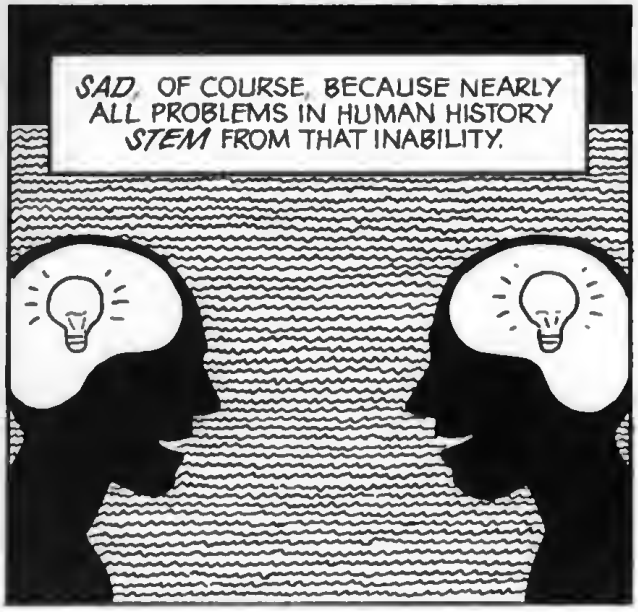


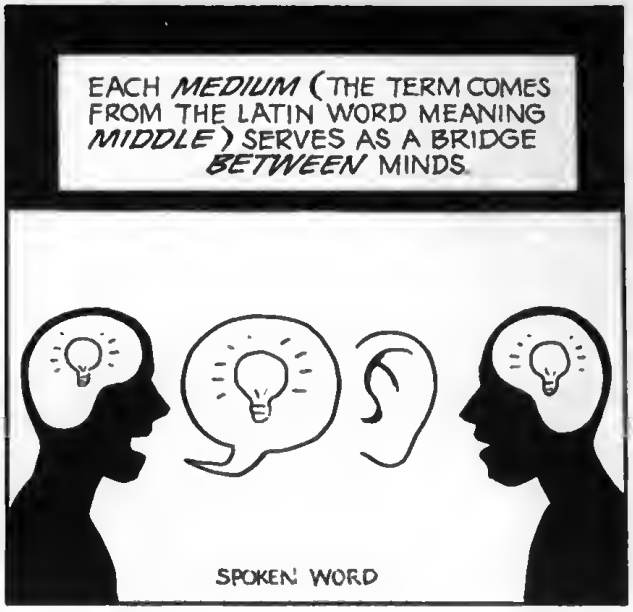

WE ALL LIVE IN A STATE OF *PROFOUND ISOLATION.*

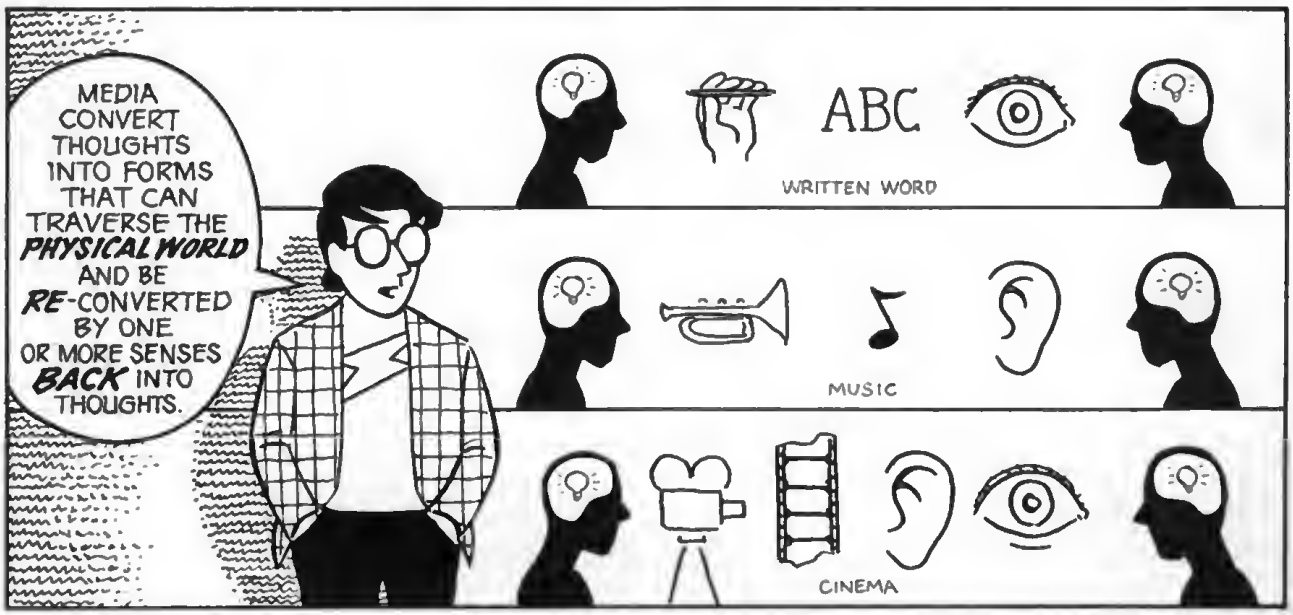

NO OTHER HUMAN BEING CAN EVER KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE YOU FROM THE *INSIDE.*

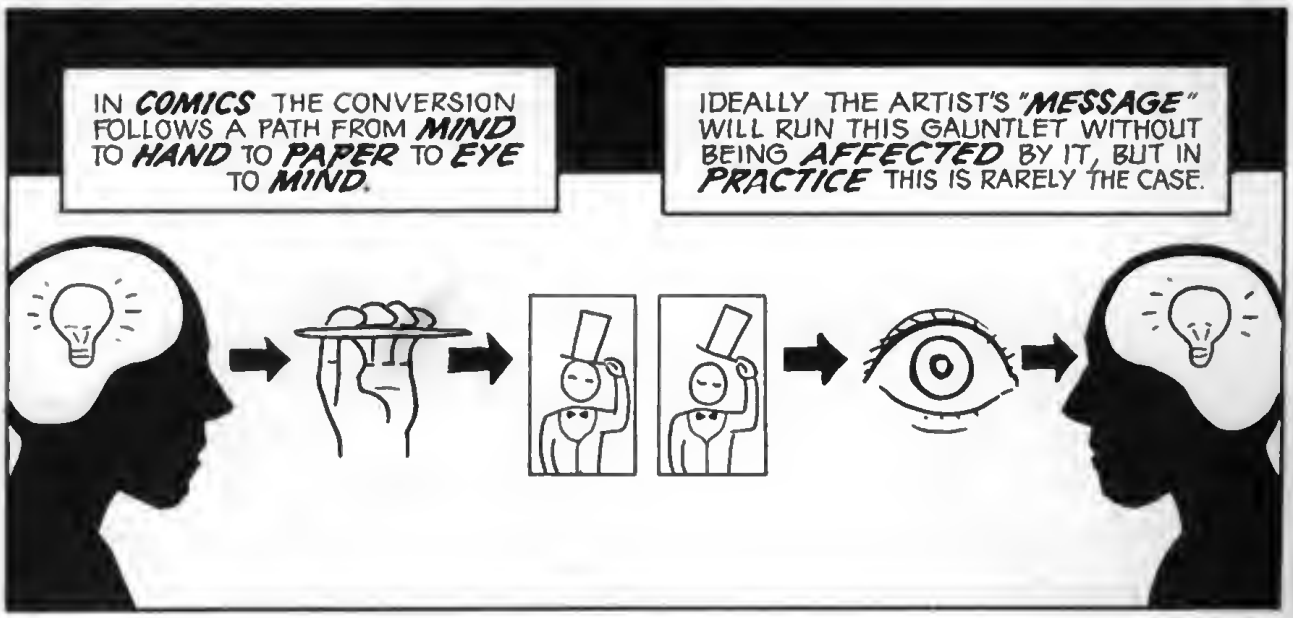

AND NO AMOUNT OF *REACHING OUT* TO *OTHERS* CAN EVER MAKE THEM FEEL EXACTLY WHAT *YOU* FEEL.


ALL MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION ARE A *BY-PRODUCT* OF OUR SAD *INABILITY* TO COMMUNICATE *DIRECTLY* FROM *MIND TO MIND.*


SAD, OF COURSE, BECAUSE NEARLY ALL PROBLEMS IN HUMAN HISTORY STEM FROM THAT INABILITY.


EACH MEDIUM (THE TERM COMES FROM THE LATIN WORD MEANING MIDDLE) SERVES AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN MINDS.
SPOKEN WORD


MEDIA CONVERT THOUGHTS INTO FORMS THAT CAN TRAVERSE THE PHYSICAL WORLD AND BE RE-CONVERTED BY ONE OR MORE SENSES BACK INTO THOUGHTS.
ABC
WRITTEN WORD
MUSIC
CINEMA


IN COMICS THE CONVERSION FOLLOWS A PATH FROM MIND TO HAND TO PAPER TO EYE TO MIND.
IDEALLY THE ARTIST'S "MESSAGE" WILL RUN THIS GAUNTLET WITHOUT BEING AFFECTED BY IT, BUT IN PRACTICE THIS IS RARELY THE CASE.


THE COMICS I "SEE" IN MY MIND WILL NEVER BE SEEN IN THEIR ENTIRETY BY ANYONE ELSE, NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY.
OCTOBER

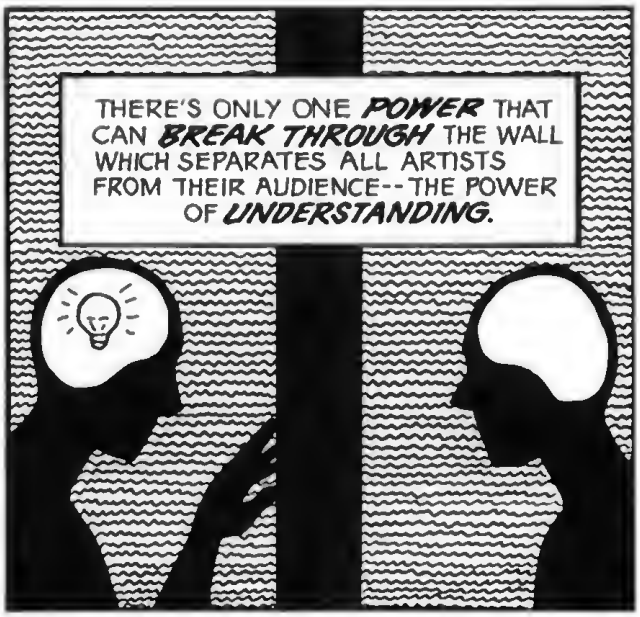

ASK ANY WRITER OR FILMMAKER OR PAINTER JUST HOW MUCH OF A GIVEN PROJECT TRULY REPRESENTS WHAT HE/SHE ENVISIONED IT TO BE.


YOU'LL HEAR TWENTY PERCENT... TEN... FIVE...
FEW WILL CLAIM MORE THAN THIRTY.


THE MASTERY OF ONE'S MEDIUM IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH THAT PERCENTAGE CAN BE INCREASED, THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE ARTIST'S IDEAS SURVIVE THE JOURNEY--

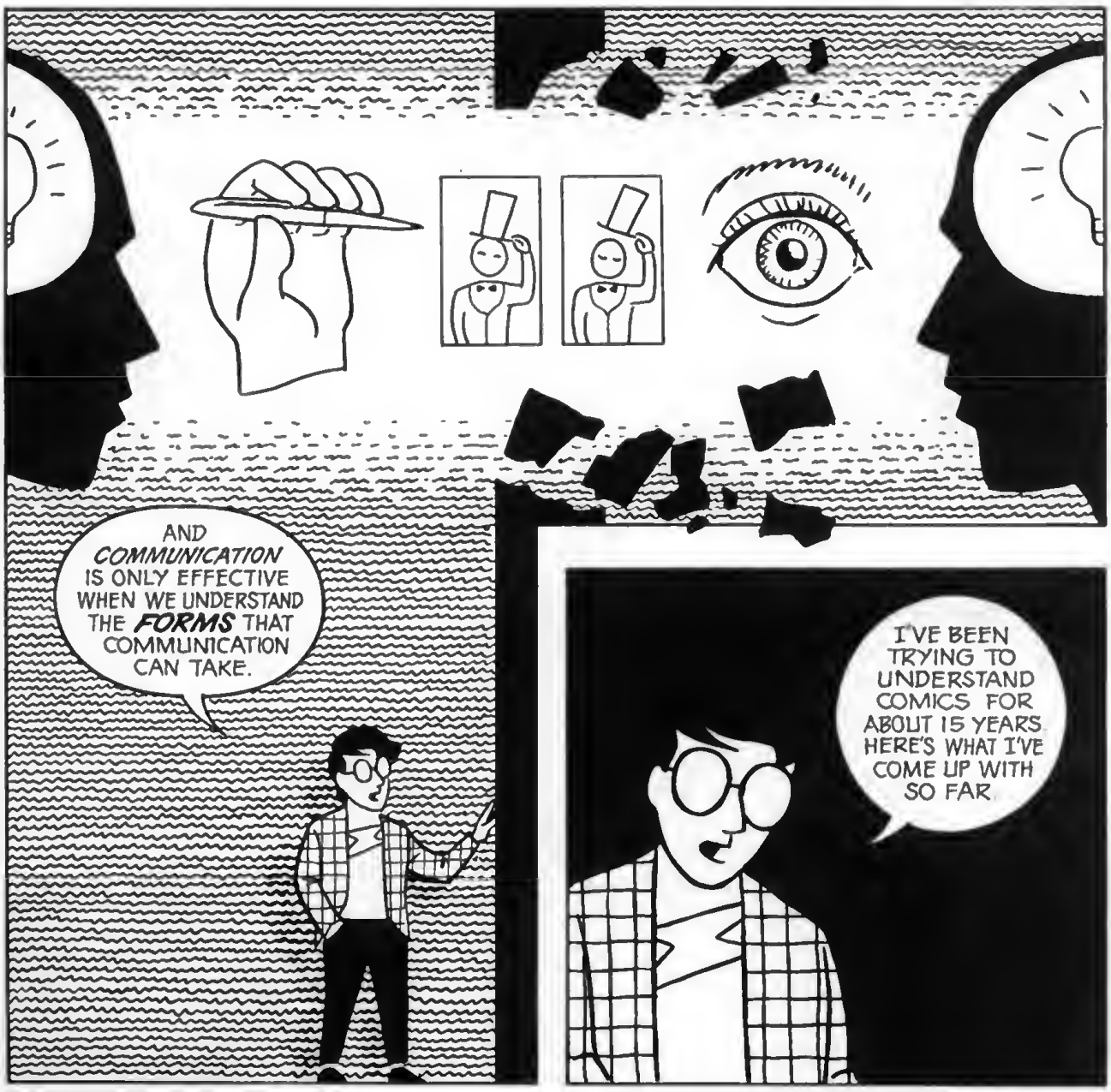

--OR, FOR SOME ARTISTS, THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE INEVITABLE DETOURS ARE MADE USEFUL BY THE ARTIST.


AS I SAID IN CHAPTER SEVEN, I BELIEVE WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY TO THE WORLD. I'M A FIRM BELIEVER IN THE INHERENT WORTH OF ALL INNER TRUTHS.


THERE'S ONLY ONE POWER THAT CAN BREAK THROUGH THE WALL WHICH SEPARATES ALL ARTISTS FROM THEIR AUDIENCE--THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING.


UNDERSTANDING COMICS IS *SERIOUS BUSINESS.*
TODAY, COMICS IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW FORMS OF *MASS COMMUNICATION* IN WHICH *INDIVIDUAL VOICES* STILL HAVE A CHANCE TO BE *HEARD.*
THOSE OF US WHO TACKLE THE *BUSINESS* OF COMICS HAVE MANY OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME--
--BUT THEY *PALE* IN COMPARISON TO WHAT A *FILMMAKER* OR *PLAYWRIGHT* HAS TO CONTEND WITH.
COMICS WELCOMES *ANY* WRITER OR ARTIST TO STEP INTO ITS WORLD, A WORLD AS CLOSE AS *PEN* OR *PENCIL* AND *PAPER.*
KOH-I-NOOR
AND NO, THEY DON'T HAVE TO BE *THESE* TYPES OF PENS AND PENCILS

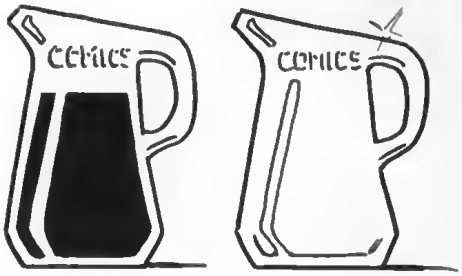

THE WALL OF IGNORANCE THAT PREVENTS SO MANY HUMAN BEINGS FROM SEEING EACH OTHER CLEARLY CAN ONLY BE BREACHED BY COMMUNICATION.


AND COMMUNICATION IS ONLY EFFECTIVE WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE FORMS THAT COMMUNICATION CAN TAKE.
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND COMICS FOR ABOUT 15 YEARS. HERE'S WHAT I'VE COME UP WITH SO FAR.

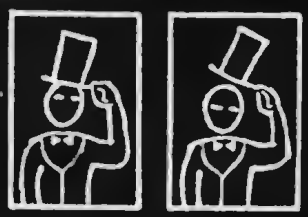
THE FIRST STEP IN ANY SUCH EFFORT IS TO *CLEAR OUR MINDS* OF ALL PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS ABOUT COMICS.

ONLY BY *STARTING FROM SCRATCH* CAN WE DISCOVER THE FULL RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES COMICS OFFER.

THIS MEANS LEARNING TO SEPARATE THE ***FORM*** OF COMICS FROM ITS OFTEN INCONSISTENT ***CONTENTS***.



THE BEST ***DEFINITION*** FOR COMICS WILL, I THINK, BE THE MOST ***EXPANSIVE***.

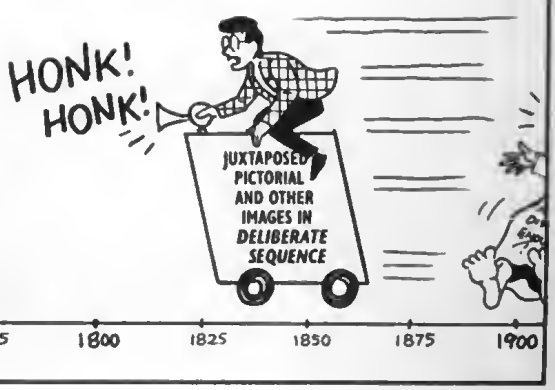


SEQUENTIAL ART

WITH A LITTLE *REFINING*, SUCH A DEFINITION CAN TAKE COMICS FAR INTO THE *FUTURE*--

JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN *DELIBERATE SEQUENCE*

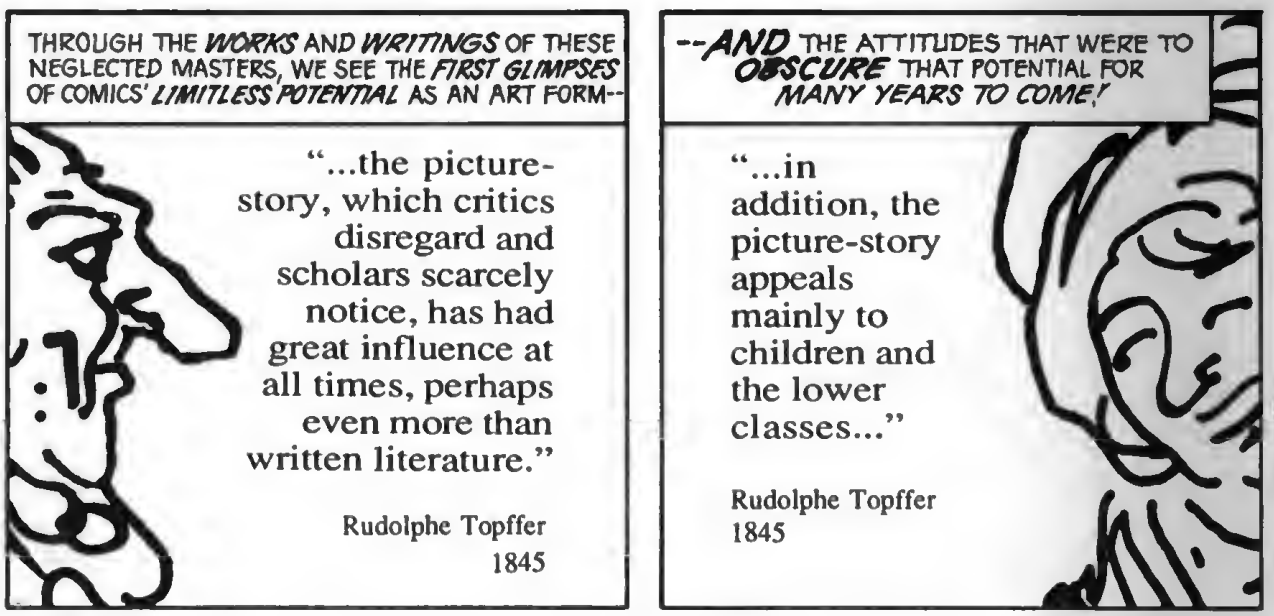
--AND FAR INTO THE ***PAST***, BEYOND THE ARTIFICIAL "*STARTING POINT*" OF 1896 AND "*THE YELLOW KID*"!



SEE PAGE 216 FOR COPYRIGHT INFORMATION.



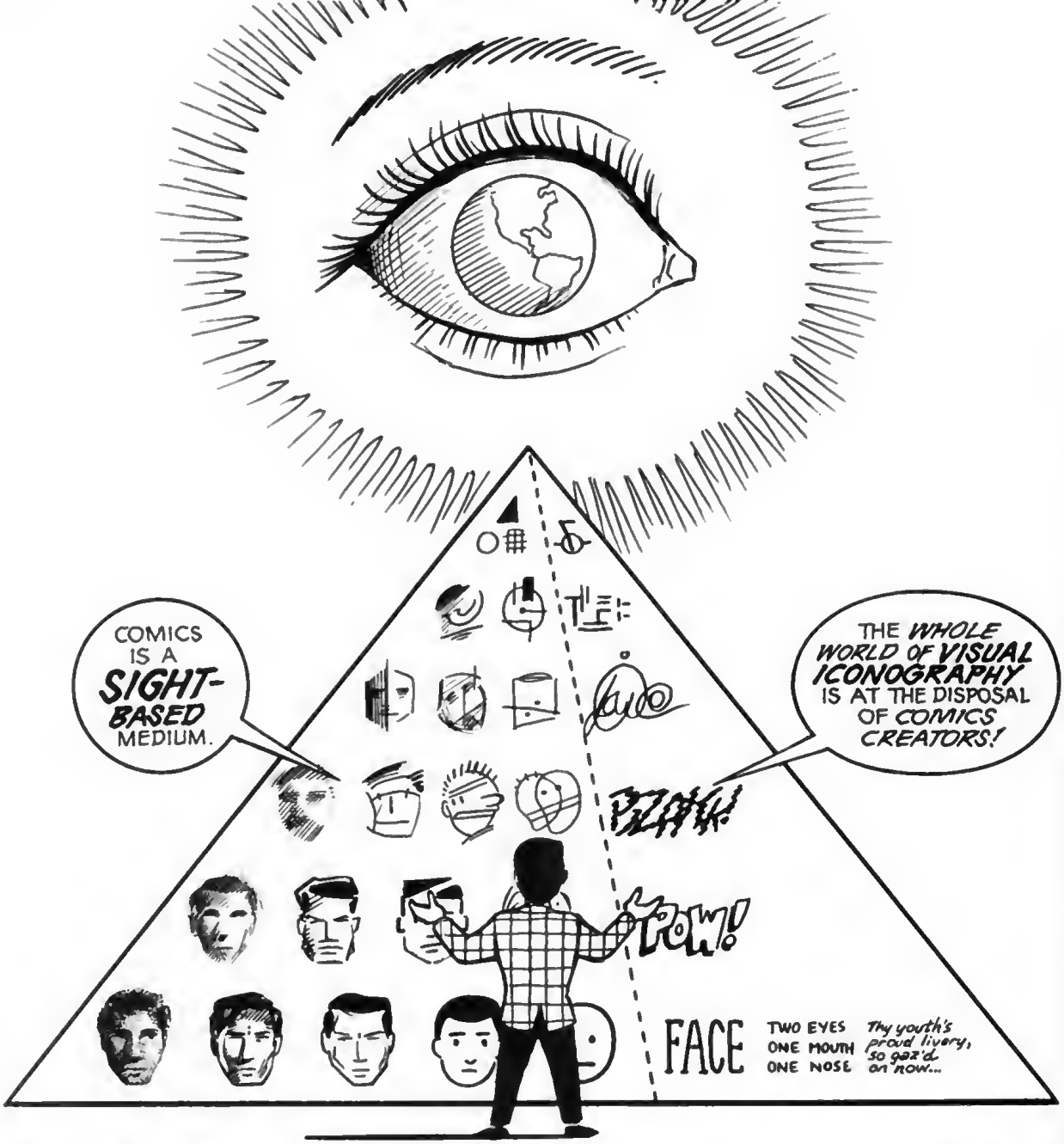
*SEE PAGE 216 FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

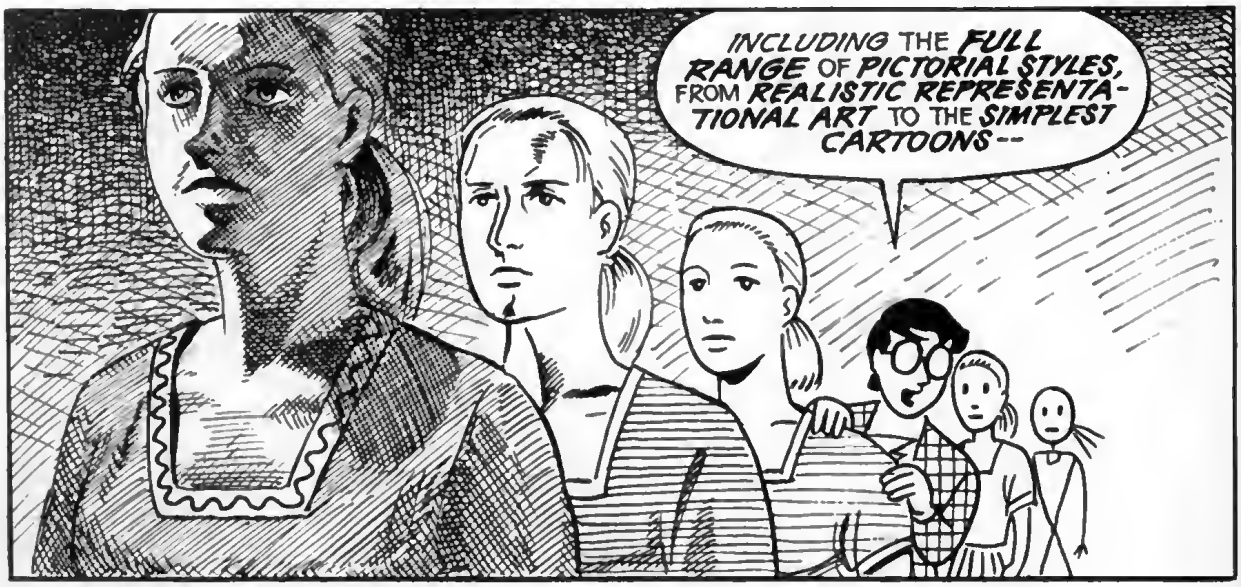


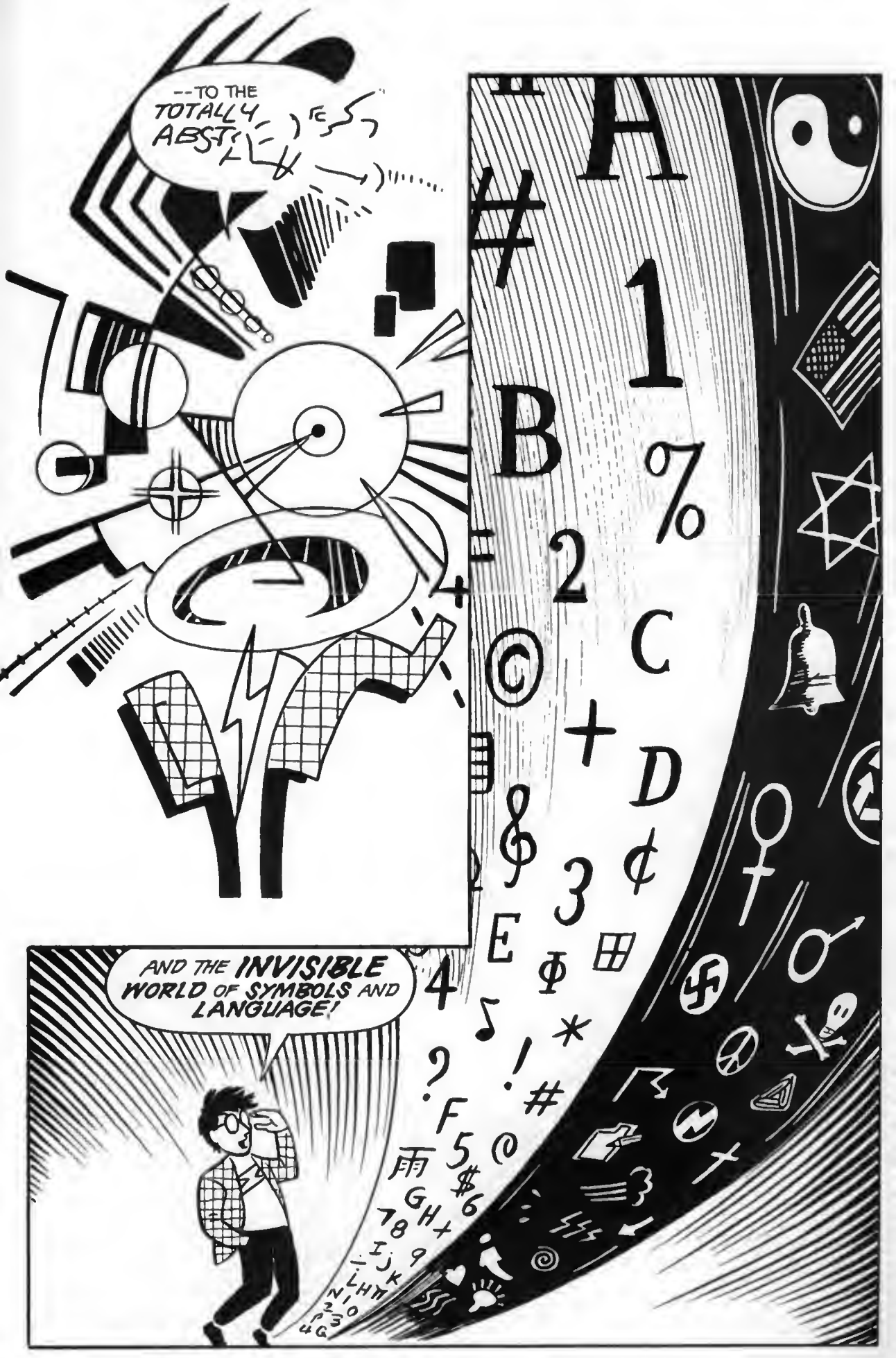
TRANSLATION BY E. WIESE.

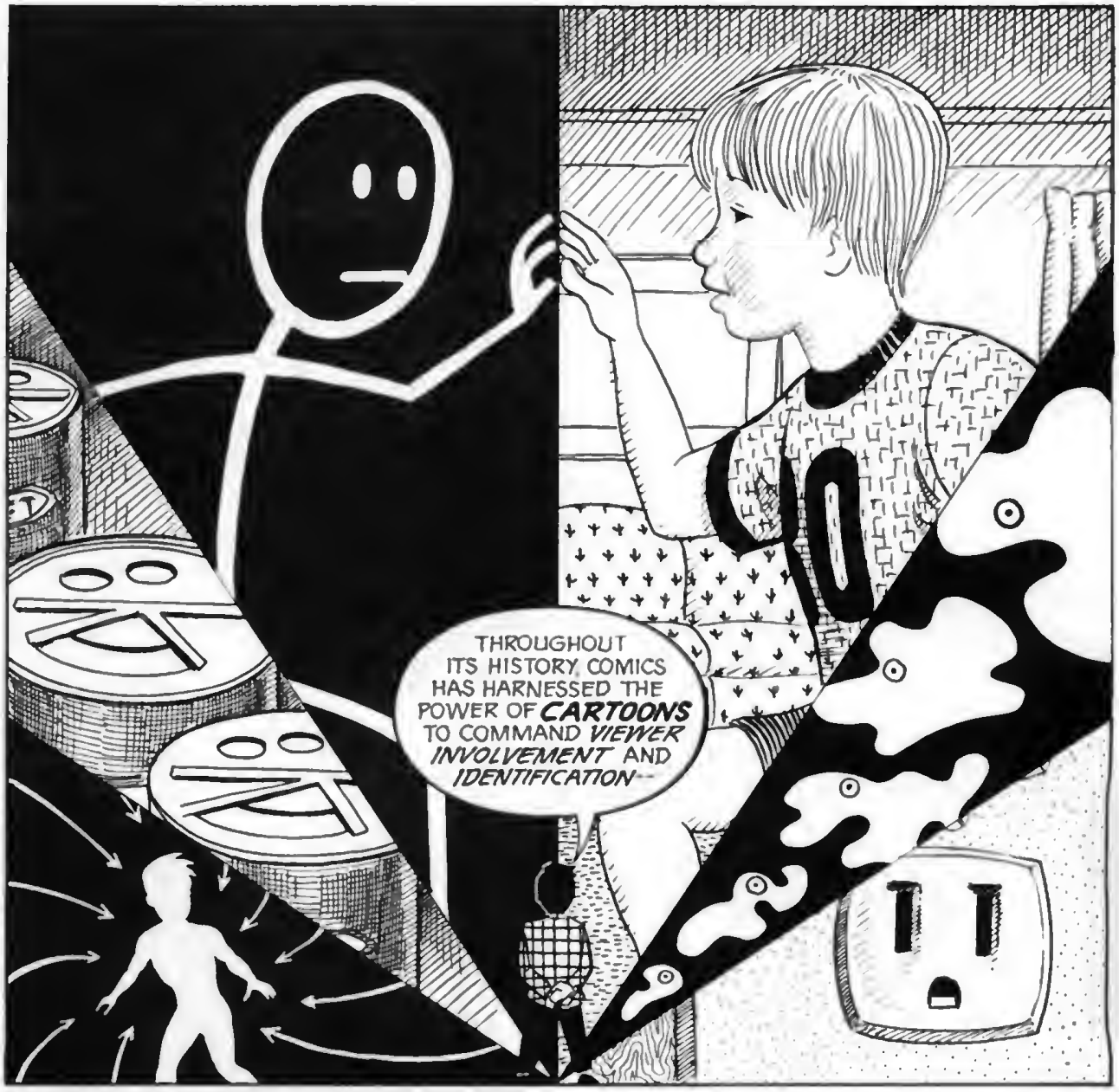


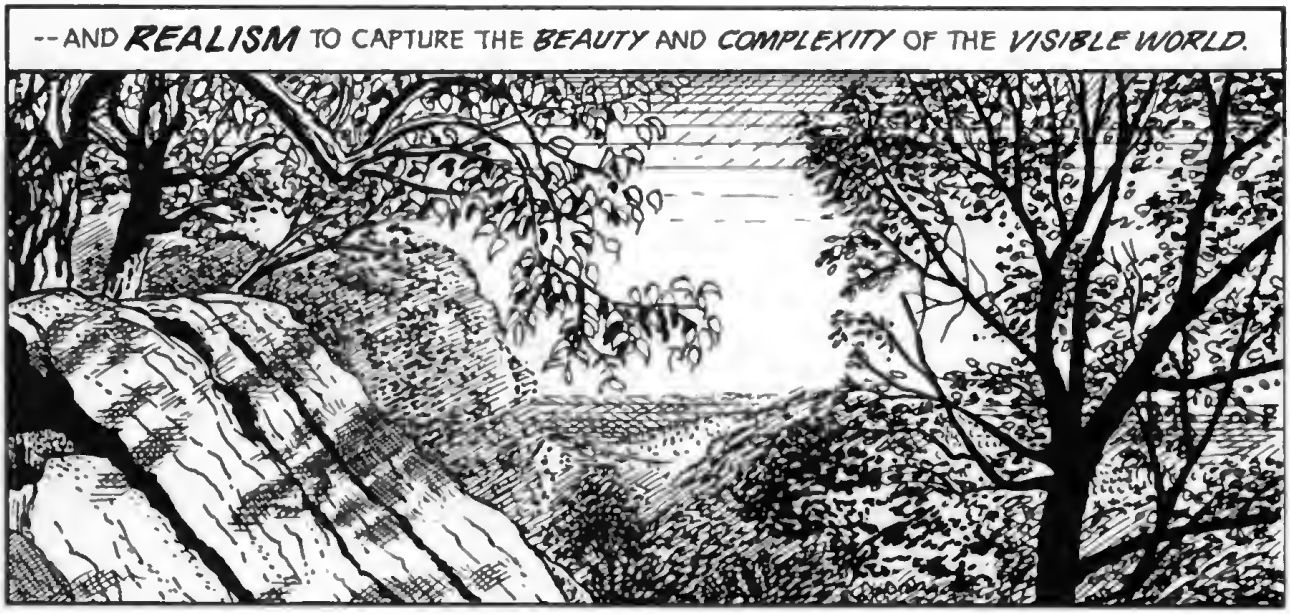
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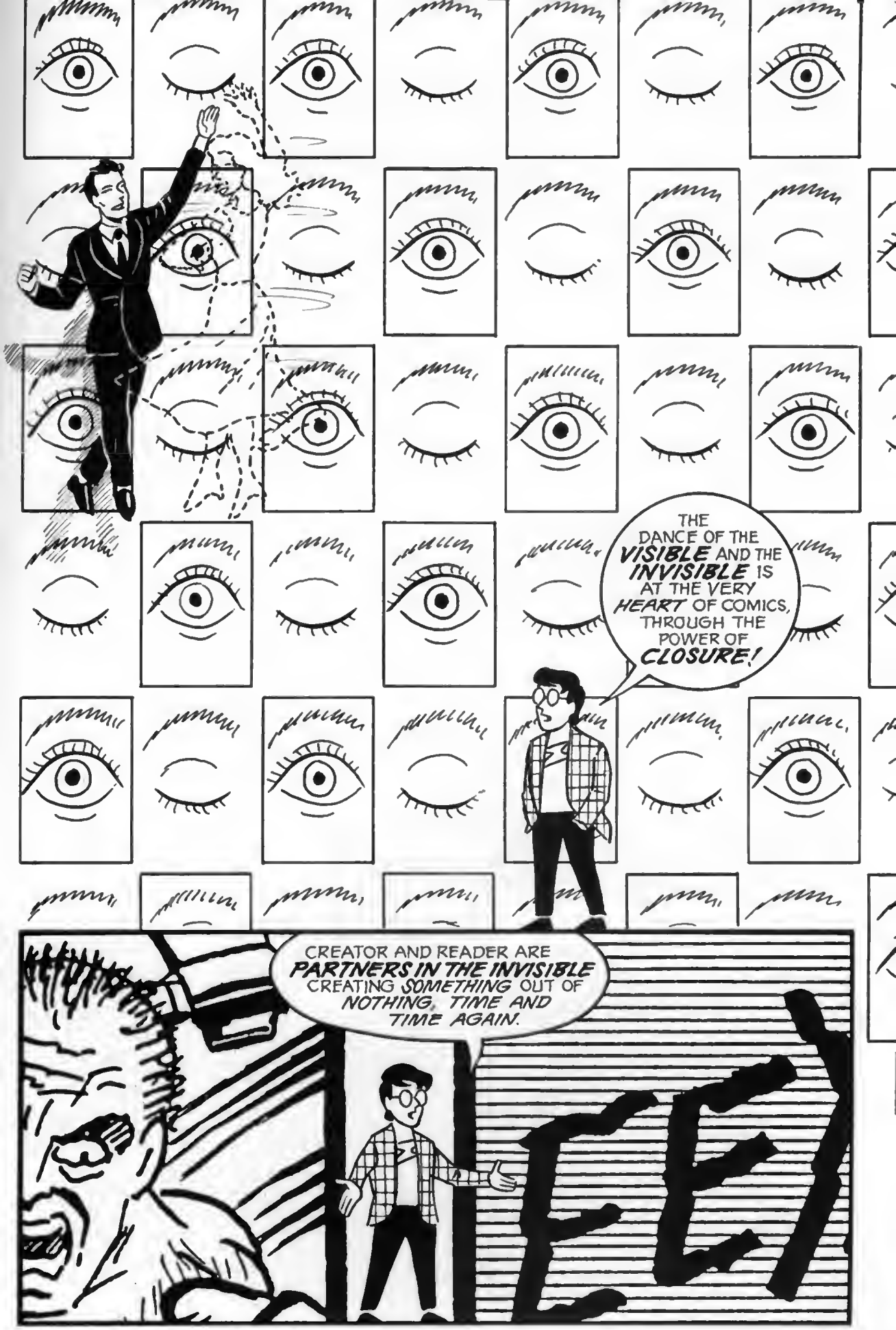

COMICS IS A SIGHT-BASED MEDIUM.
THE WHOLE WORLD OF VISUAL ICONOGRAPHY IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF COMICS CREATORS!
POW!
FACE
TWO EYES
ONE MOUTH
ONE NOSE
Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now...


INCLUDING THE FULL RANGE OF PICTORIAL STYLES, FROM REALISTIC REPRESENTATIONAL ART TO THE SIMPLEST CARTOONS--


--TO THE TOTALLY ABSTRACT--
AND THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF SYMBOLS AND LANGUAGE!

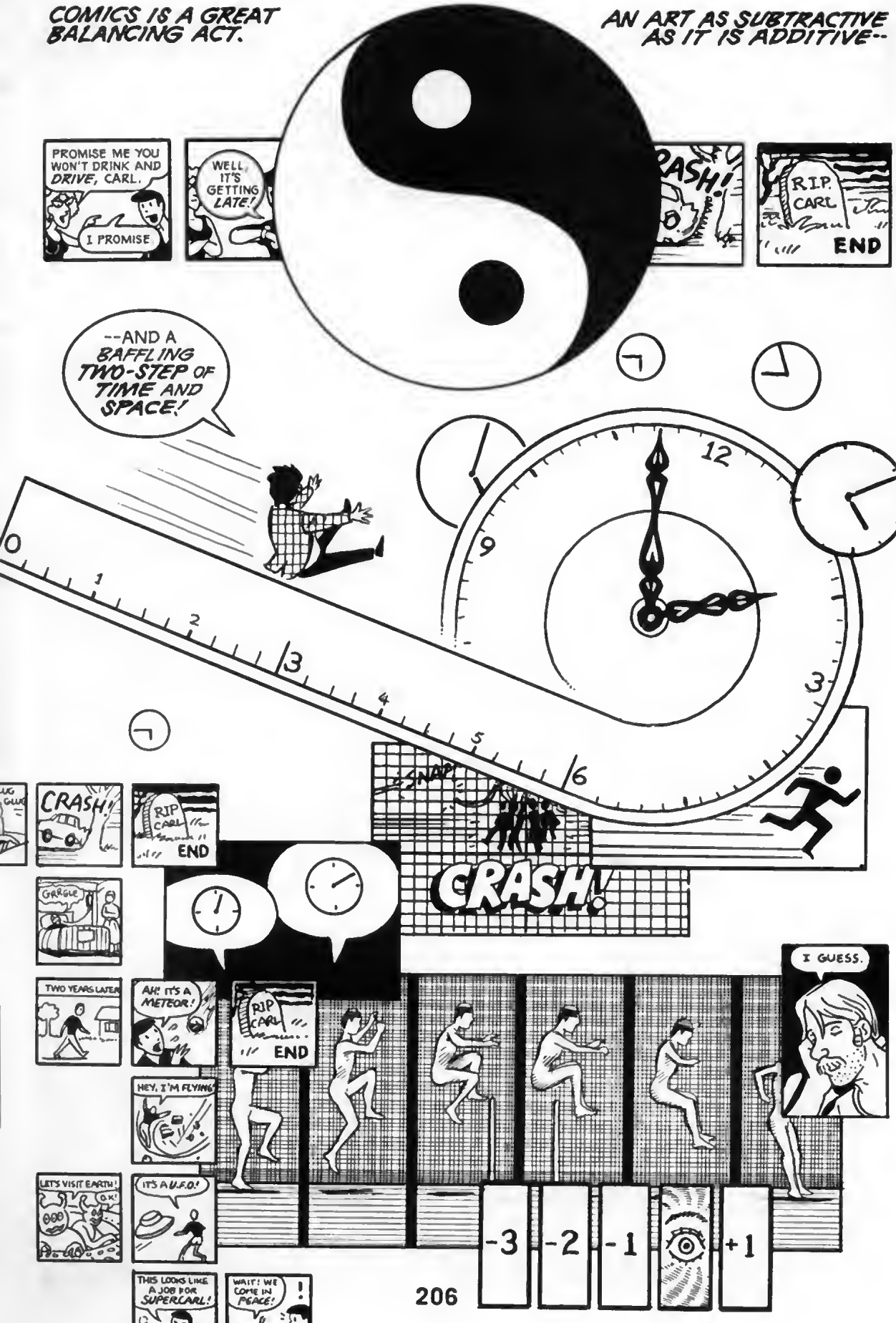

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, COMICS HAS HARNESSED THE POWER OF CARTOONS TO COMMAND VIEWER INVOLVEMENT AND IDENTIFICATION--


--AND REALISM TO CAPTURE THE BEAUTY AND COMPLEXITY OF THE VISIBLE WORLD.


THE DANCE OF THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE IS AT THE VERY HEART OF COMICS, THROUGH THE POWER OF CLOSURE!
CREATOR AND READER ARE PARTNERS IN THE INVISIBLE CREATING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING, TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

COMICS IS A GREAT BALANCING ACT.

AN ART AS SUBTRACTIVE AS IT IS ADDITIVE--



BUT NOWHERE IS THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE *VISIBLE* AND THE *INVISIBLE* MORE CONSPICUOUS THAN IN *PICTURES* AND *WORDS*...

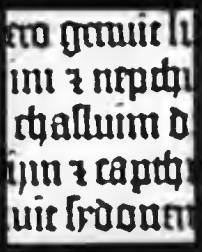




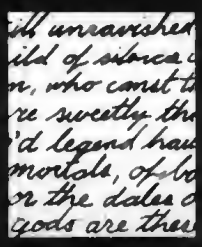










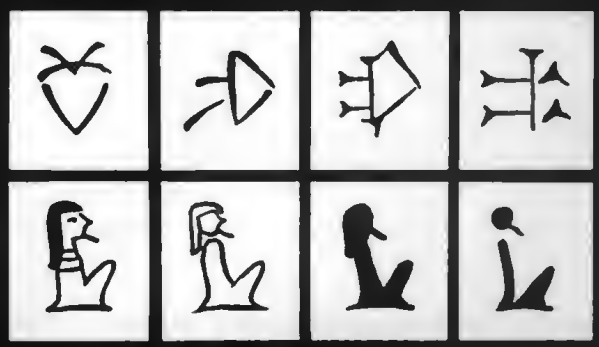




FACE

...A SPLIT FORETOLD IN THE *BIRTH OF ART ITSELF*--

--BEGUN IN EARNEST OVER *5,000 YEARS AGO*--

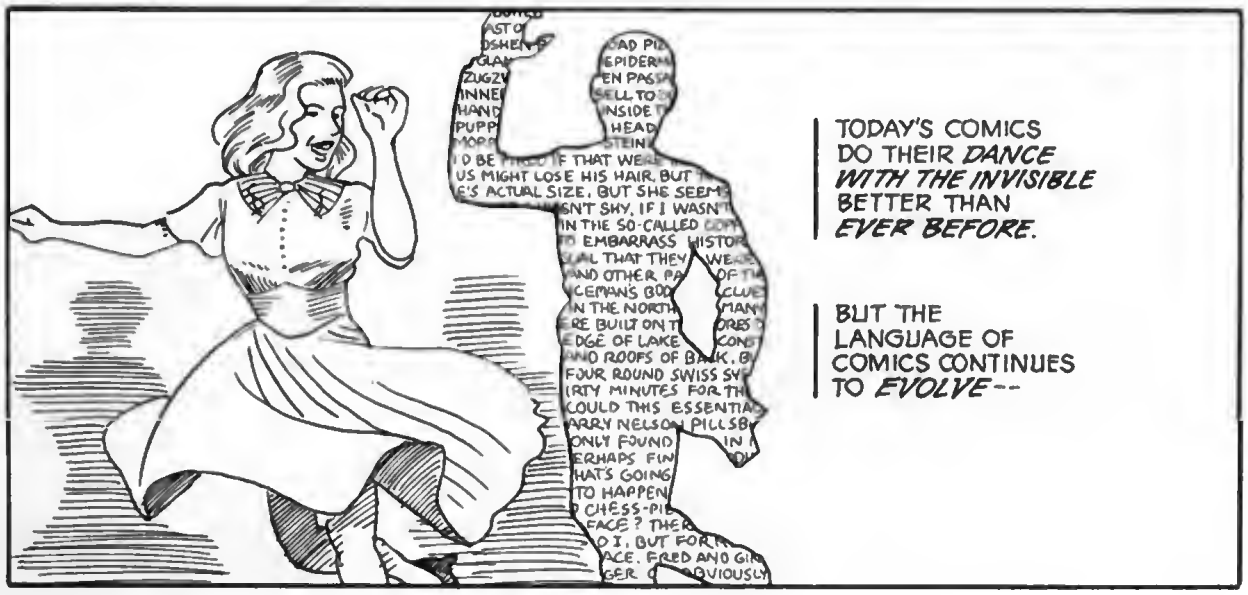


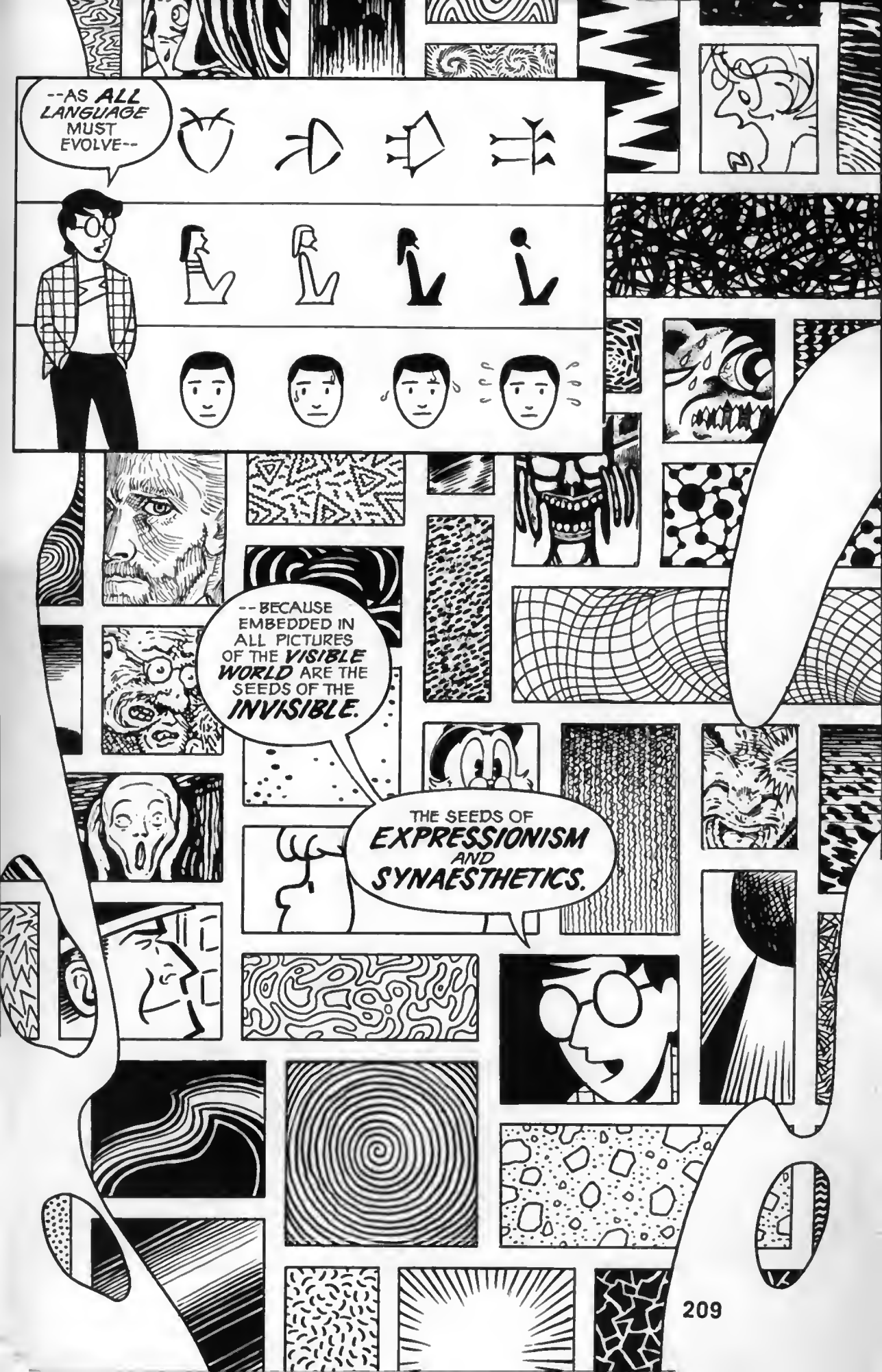
--AND GROWN *WIDER AND WIDER* FOR *CENTURIES* UNTIL EVENTUALLY, ALL CONNECTION WAS LOST--





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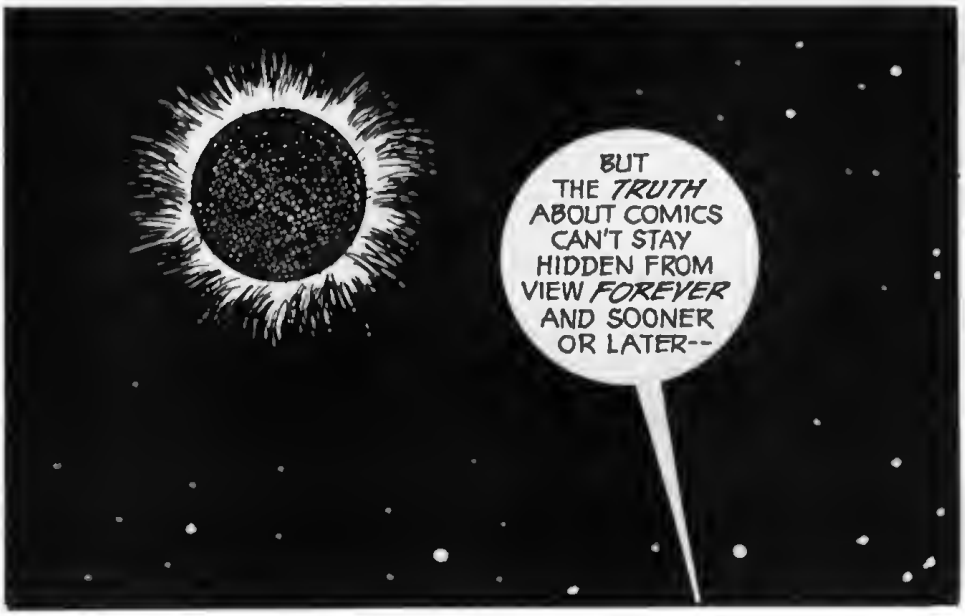



--AS ALL LANGUAGE MUST EVOLVE--
--BECAUSE EMBEDDED IN ALL PICTURES OF THE VISIBLE WORLD ARE THE SEEDS OF THE INVISIBLE.
THE SEEDS OF EXPRESSIONISM AND SYNAESTHETICS.


BUT EVOLUTION IS A TRICKY THING. SPECIES EVOLVE DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT CLIMATES.
NORTH AMERICA
EUROPE
SO IT WAS IN JAPAN WHERE COMICS DEVELOPED IN RELATIVE ISOLATION, SPAWNING A HOST OF UNIQUE APPROACHES TO MAKING COMICS.
COLLAGE
STORYTELLING
EXPRESSIONISM
JAPAN
FORMATS
WORD-PICTURE LINKAGE
SUBJECTIVE MOTION
ICONIC CHARACTERS
THE "MASKING" EFFECT

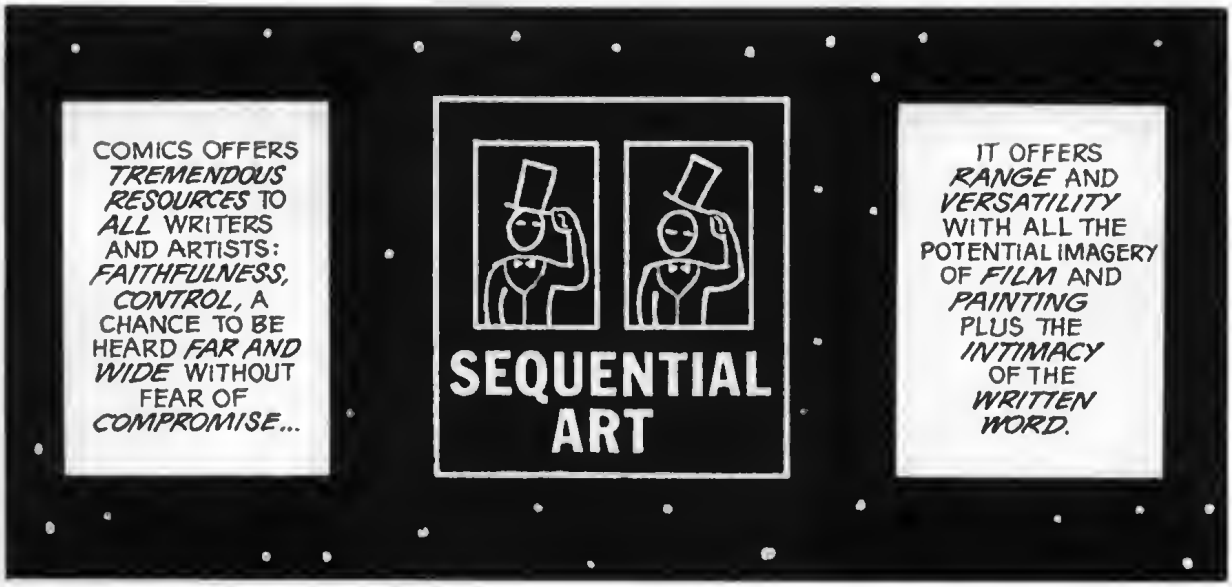

TRUTH
FINE ART
LITERATURE
AS COMICS GROWS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY, CREATORS WILL ASPIRE TO MANY HIGHER GOALS THAN APPEALING TO THE "LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR."


TRUTH
IGNORANCE AND SHORT-SIGHTED BUSINESS PRACTICES WILL NO DOUBT OBSCURE THE POSSIBILITIES OF COMICS FROM TIME TO TIME AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE.


BUT THE TRUTH ABOUT COMICS CAN'T STAY HIDDEN FROM VIEW FOREVER AND SOONER OR LATER--


--THE TRUTH WILL SHINE THROUGH!

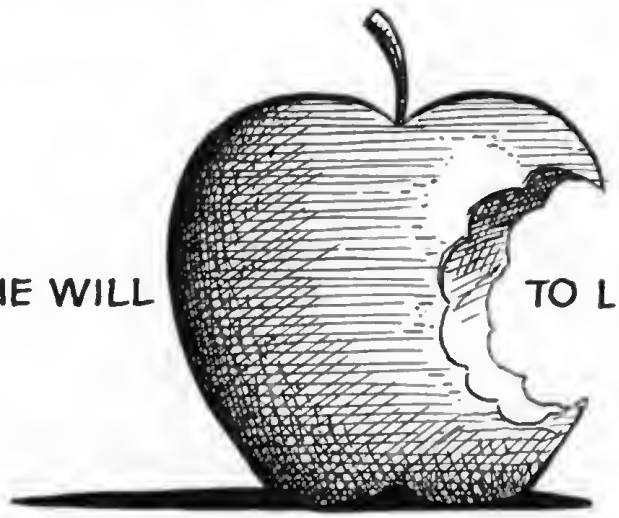

DADA
BIOGRAPHY
HORROR
ROMANCE
SURREALISM
BLANK VERSE
HISTORICAL FICTION
EPIC POETRY
FOLK TALES
SOCIAL ALLEGORY
EROTICA
MYSTERY
ADAPTATIONS
RELIGIOUS TOPICS
STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
SATIRE
SEQUENTIAL ART
SEQUENTIAL ART
SEQUENTIAL ART
SPRAY PAINT
TODAY THE POSSIBILITIES FOR COMICS ARE -- AS THEY ALWAYS HAVE BEEN --
--ENDLESS.


COMICS OFFERS *TREMENDOUS RESOURCES* TO *ALL* WRITERS AND ARTISTS: *FAITHFULNESS, CONTROL,* A CHANCE TO BE HEARD *FAR AND WIDE* WITHOUT FEAR OF *COMPROMISE...*
SEQUENTIAL ART
IT OFFERS *RANGE* AND *VERSATILITY* WITH ALL THE POTENTIAL IMAGERY OF *FILM* AND *PAINTING* PLUS THE *INTIMACY* OF THE *WRITTEN WORD.*

AND ALL THAT'S NEEDED IS THE DESIRE TO BE HEARD--

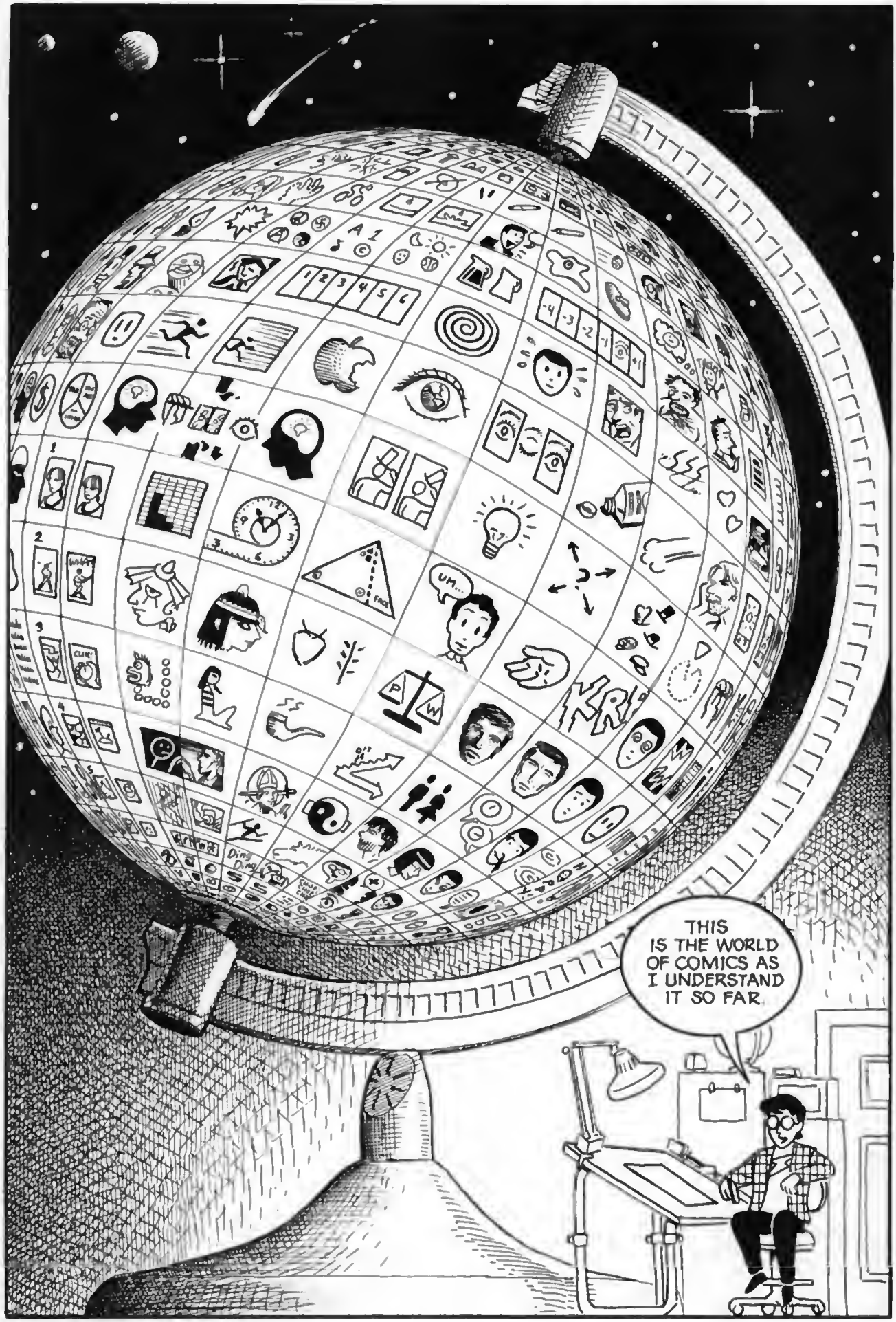
1 2 3 4 5 6

--THE WILL



TO LEARN--

--AND THE ABILITY TO SEE.


UM...
THIS IS THE WORLD OF COMICS AS I UNDERSTAND IT SO FAR.


I'VE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT COMICS SINCE BEGINNING THIS PROJECT AND I KNOW I HAVE A LOT LEFT TO LEARN.
I HOPE YOU'LL ALL CONSIDER EXPLORING -- OR CONTINUING TO EXPLORE -- COMICS ON YOUR OWN!
HOWEVER YOU EXPERIENCE COMICS -- AS READER, CREATOR OR BUSINESSPERSON -- THERE ARE A MILLION AND ONE WAYS YOU CAN HELP COMICS TO GROW INTO THE NEXT CENTURY.
THINK ABOUT IT.
AND THANKS FOR LISTENING.
HMM?
OH, WOW, DID I TAKE THAT LONG? I'M SORRY. I BETTER LET YOU GO!
BACK TO THE OLD DRAWING BOARD!
AT LEAST YOU'RE NOT MARRIED TO HIM. I GET THIS ALL THE TIME!
'92

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McLuhan, Marshall: *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964).

Schwartz, Tony: *Media: The Second God* (New York: Anchor Books, 1983).

Wiese, E., editor, translator: *Enter: The Comics--Rodolphe Topffer's Essay on Physiognomy and the True Story of Monsieur Crepin* (Lincoln, Ne: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

Special note: Kunzle's book (see above) has gone virtually unnoticed by the comics community but is an enormously important work, covering nearly 400 years of forgotten European comics. Check it out!

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